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FACE THE FOOTLIGHTS!

FACE THE FOOTLIGHTS

*A New and Practical Approach
to Acting*

BY
E. B. (Zeke) COLVAN

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To my wife

DORIS COLVAN

without whose help this book could not
have been written

Preface

WHEN a young actor is told by a theatrical manager that he is not suited to a part, nine times out of ten the reason given is—*inexperience*.

The producer is looking for someone who can handle the part with a reasonable degree of sureness. He has neither the time nor the inclination to gamble with hidden talent, which, although fresh and spontaneous in many cases, will seem to the audience in the theater nothing short of amateurish. The producer wants, and is usually able to get, an experienced actor to fill the part.

Experience! What is it, anyway?

Webster calls it "knowledge derived from one's past actions," and if ever a meaning fitted a case, this one does, so far as the theater is concerned. For the man or woman who hasn't a practical knowledge of the stage, derived from past performances, hasn't a chance in this busy world. Before he can hope to get started in the theater, he must manage somehow to acquire this working knowledge and make it a part of his personal equipment.

The question, then, is: How and where is the young player to get experience?

In the old days, the answer was easy. "Join a stock company and learn the things you need to know" was the universal advice of the old performer to the stage-struck boy and girl. "If it's in you, the stock company work will bring it out."

In stock, the actors had the benefit of expert direction. The best directors of the day (many of our well-trained Broadway directors sprang from that source) were part of the stock company setup. Weekly, season in and season out, they were on the job, producing one play by night and directing another by day.

Parts were necessarily varied. In one season of stock, the new player did everything from "The Count of Monte Cristo" to "Charley's Aunt," with chorus work on slim weeks and spear carrying when there wasn't anything else to do. He had a lot to learn, and he learned it.

In one show, he picked up a trick of make-up; in another, how to throw his voice over the footlights; in a third, the right way to stand and walk. If he had any intelligence at all, by the end of the season he had gained this working knowledge. He had *experience* to offer a producer when he applied for a job.

But now it's a different story. The stock companies are gone, and the modern plays, such as they are, are few and far between. If an actor takes what he can get from time to time (and what alternative has he?), he'll have to go on for years before he has this experience.

An occasional engagement never gave any young actor enough practical experience to lift him out of the ranks of the amateur.

Let us assume, for instance, that the actor gets a break. Because he is slight and fair and has the appealing face of a young choirboy, he is cast in a juvenile part in a Broadway play of prep school life. The director takes the lad in hand; he coaches him carefully until the actor is, in truth, the boy of the play. In one part, at least, he is a success.

If the actor is alert, and a good student, he may get more from the season's work than the ability to portray one character well. If he watches the other actors make their moves and crosses, if he studies their gestures and listens to their voice intonations in lighting and shading of speech, he may, by watching carefully, pick up objective information on acting. *But this information will remain objective and nothing more until the actor makes it his own*

by practice. Not until he has used this new information through actual performance will he have gained experience.

Of course, there's a chance that the boy isn't what we call a student. He may be just an actor, who, when he gets a small part after a long wait, is satisfied to rest on his glory. He may have only two or three lines, but, technically speaking, if he wants to, he can boast that he has "had experience." When he goes back to the first manager who turned him down, he can say in all honesty, "I've just finished a season in 'What's Wrong with Your Life?'"

The statement may impress the producer. He may hand the actor a part and tell him to read it—which the boy will do, of course. And then, despite the full season in "What's Wrong with Your Life?" he will get the same answer: "Inexperience!"

In my twenty-five years' experience in the theater as actor, director, and producer, I have run up against all the phases of inexperience. The new actor is not the only one who suffers this lack. I have met men and women, thoroughly at home when they appeared before an audience, who were totally lacking in what I term "theatrical working knowledge." Radio, concert, and vaudeville stars—even highly paid grand opera singers—have come to me with full assurance that they were experienced in the theater, only to find, when confronted with a part, that they were novices.

So limited had been their scope that they remained individuals merely, not stage performers in the fullest sense.

The reason for this limitation is obvious. Move a radio singer or actor a few steps from the microphone and see how terrified he becomes. If you check on her, you will see that the average concert singer never wanders far from the piano. Certainly the vaudeville single, working close to the footlights in the spot called the "apron" and speaking directly to the audience, is lost when you shove him around the stage and call on him to integrate his performance with that of the other players into a smooth working unit.

All these people are tops in their fields, but so highly specialized are their performances that they have *developed only one side of their art. In the theater, all sides must be developed.* What an actor does, no matter how important or unimportant, is interdependent upon the work of the other players. Even the star must depend on his supporting cast.

I have said that theatrical experience is knowledge put into practice. And I believe that an intelligent person can make this knowledge a part of his equipment before he sets foot on a stage if he learns certain fundamental rules. In the theater, we must have a standard to go by; everything we do is based on the rules that go to make this standard. If sometimes the rules become outmoded and have to be changed, that's all right, too. But before an actor can break a rule and make a new one, he must understand the basis of the original rule. *Traditions may be called stilted, but basic principles of acting remain just what they have always been: solid and usable.*

Many books have been written on acting, mainly on *what to do in the theater* and *what not to do*. But so far as I know, no one has ever written a book on "*how to*" *do the things that have to be done.*

It is my purpose to attempt such a book, a practical "how to" discussion of the problems of acting. I do not propose to show a young man how Richard Mansfield put over a shoulder shrug in "Richard the Third" or a budding actress the secret of how Maude Adams played "L'Aiglon." My purpose, rather, is to see that he learns a set of stage mechanics, similar to those which I have taught to hundreds of young actors in my years in the theater, which, when he has mastered them, will become his own and give him *theatrical experience.*

Acting can be learned.

The saying that an actor is born, not made, is not more truthful than that one is born a writer or musician or painter. Talent, in most cases, is the capacity for learning, plus intelligence and emotional depths. Given these three qualities, and the *ability to stick*, there is no reason why a young person's acting should not develop into a fine art.

If he feels that he simply must act and that nothing else in the world will satisfy him, the chances are that, with proper study, he will make good. If he doesn't feel that way, he'd better take up law or banking. The theater isn't for dilettantes.

In my years in the theater, the training of American actors has definitely advanced, but it still has far to go. There should be an American Theater, headed by an American director, where the young American student can learn his craft.

Americans, as people, differ from Europeans in thought, tempo, mannerisms, sentiments, and reactions; and Americans, as actors, should reflect these national qualities.

Our greatest stars, Katharine Cornell, Helen Hayes, Jane Cowl, Tallulah Bankhead, Katharine Hepburn, the three Barrymores, Alfred Lunt, Walter Huston, Walter Hampden, Fredric March, and many others are exponents of the distinctive American style of acting. We need more of them.

Each of my twenty-five years on the stage has enlarged my vision and clarified my thinking, in so far as the principles of dramatic training are concerned. New ideas crop up every day. We must never grow too rigid to evaluate them. But one thing never changes—and I've known it from the day when I first heard the call, "Face the footlights!" It is the first requirement of the man or woman who considers a stage career.

If you want to be an actor, you must put your career above everything else. There can be no compromise.

So I say, if you want to be an actor, be a good one, or stay out of the profession. To be a good one, you must love your work. And if you love it, you will study it.

ZEKE COLVAN.

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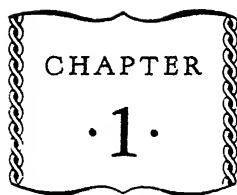
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FACE THE FOOTLIGHTS!

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Acting Looks So Easy

BACKSTAGE it is dark and damp and smells of musty old scenery, but you wouldn't change places with the privileged ones who sun themselves at Palm Beach. In the center of the stage, one dim light shines forth to guide you. Through a haze of dust, you see a plain kitchen table and beside it, teetering to and fro on a rickety chair, Mr. Donald, the famous director. The boards, those magic planks on which Cornell, Hayes, and Barrymore have trod, creak beneath your feet.

Steady, now, you tell yourself. There's nothing to fear. Didn't you play Nora in the little theater production of "A Doll's House"? And haven't you a wonderful letter of introduction to Mr. Donald from Frank Trent, back home, who went to school with him?

Timidly you hand Mr. Donald the letter, limp and smudged from handling. "Are you an actress?" he asks. You hope so, but you're not sure.

"Take off your hat, miss," Mr. Donald grunts. "Come down left center."

Left center. That's a new one on you. Your legs buckle beneath you. You look around for help; you try to swallow the lump in your throat. Finally, as the moments tick on and you know you must do something, you step gingerly across the stage. Mr. Donald is speaking again.

"That's enough. Here, read this over for me."

He hands you two pages ("sides," he calls them). You take a deep breath and begin.

"Give it a little more shading, miss," Mr. Donald interrupts. "Move on that speech and cross upper right. Make an oblique cross on the next line. Break it there!"

Oh, dear, we didn't learn that at school, you have to admit as the volley of directions hits you and leaves you numb.

"Try it again," says the director patiently. "You are reading a letter. You enter, carrying a bunch of flowers. Before you put the flowers on the table, you smell them. Then you see the letter. You pick it up with interest and read it. No, miss, you are smelling the letter and reading the flowers. . . . Try again. Ask yourself, what would I do in real life? The man is threatening you . . . but you do not react. I see no response in your eyes. All right, now try again, and don't forget that is a telephone you are holding. You use both hands [now he is getting sarcastic]. . . . And why did you use that foot to cross on?"

The stage begins to blur. . . . Your head is pounding. This is worse than anything you've dreamed of. . . .

Then the blow falls.

"I'm doing another play in a couple of months," says Mr. Donald. "Come back and see me then. Perhaps . . . when you've had experience . . ."

Somehow you manage to mumble your thanks and escape. Outside the theater, you sit down and take stock of yourself. You are one of the unequipped, gallant horde of young people who set out each season to conquer the theatrical world. And you have suffered your first major setback.

What next?

Go home and admit defeat? Never! You'd rather die. You'll stick it out no matter what it costs. You have a hundred dollars, maybe, and a raccoon coat that you can pawn. You'll move from the comfortable hotel with the good address and get a cheap room with a gas plate, and you'll hole in.

You'll show the director that you can get stage experience.



Walter Huston, as Peter Stuyvesant, who called his peg leg his trustiest weapon, defends himself against the Indians in "Knickerbocker Holiday," by Maxwell Anderson. (By Courtesy of The Playrights' Co.)

It is natural enough to laugh at the awkwardness of the beginner in any art. And, properly administered, ridicule is sometimes the best means of spurring on the hardy performer who has things to learn and the proper perspective on the learning process.

But all new actors haven't this perspective, and frequently the first burst of laughter so wounds his tender ego that the beginner retires in confusion. The seasoned performer is seldom tolerant of the amateur, and this bigotry, unfortunately, is true of many of our best directors. Constructive criticism would help, but the director hasn't the patience to go through tiresome practice routine until the novice has learned his craft. It's simpler to smile kindly and tell the actor to come back later on when he has had experience.

Many years ago, when I began my own work as director, I gauged my kind of training by the response of the new actor to the instruction. Anything that seemed too complicated was discarded immediately and a newer and simpler form provided. In so doing, it became necessary for me to study each actor and his individual requirements. I charted an analysis of the boy or girl and planned a systematic attack on his acting problems.

Each player had a different problem calling for different treatment. One girl had naturally graceful hands and a poor speaking voice. Another had a clear, rich voice and awkward body movements. A third hadn't the slightest conception of how to study a part. A fourth had no sense of stage locations.

To tell a young actor to synchronize his voice, facial expressions, body control, and sense of direction all at once would mean complete confusion. Instead I took up the weaknesses one at a time and showed the player how to overcome them.

Out of this program of analysis, treatment, and cure, I have evolved a questionnaire for the beginning actor to consider before he attempts any sort of dramatic training. It seems to me that he can avoid loss of time and energy and countless disappointments if he will check to the best of his ability the qualifications for the job he has before him. Even though his score be low, he needn't

give up, provided he is willing to study to overcome the handicaps that seem so formidable at the start. I have said, remember, that *acting can be learned*. And certain fundamental personality problems can be solved if the actor will give himself a chance.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. *Have You an Imagination?*

Do people, places, and events really register with you? Have you sufficient mental and emotional resiliency to adjust immediately to the new impression, or do you cling tenaciously to preconceived ideas? Do you do your own thinking, or do you abide by the opinions, written and verbal, of others?

If you fall short of perfection here, there's no cause for alarm. You can make your imagination grow. Leisurely observation, reading, studying, thinking will eventually take your mind below the surface until you shall have achieved imaginative significance. All the great stage performers have been possessed of highly developed imagination.

2. *How Well Do You Know People?*

In the theater, not only are you playing to an audience of people but you are working with people on the stage. The ability to get on with others, through an understanding of them and of yourself, is your chief personality asset.

The characters you play are people created from life by the playwright. Their actions, automatic though they may seem, are based on sound psychological behavior. Why people do as they do must be clear to you before you can interpret them intelligently.

3. *Are You Able to Take Criticism?*

The thin-skinned actor has a hard time of it from the start. The ability to take and use criticism must be made a part of your acting armor. Until you are big enough to take a severe reprimand

before a whole company of players, you aren't big enough to be an actor.

4. *How Easily Do You Succumb to Disappointment?*

The actor's life is at best a precarious one. He has to smile when his once fat part is cut to a few lines. He must have the courage to start a round of job hunting as soon as his show closes. He must appear prosperous even when he doesn't know where the next month's rent is coming from. His whole future may depend on the impression he makes on the manager who is interviewing him. If he slumps into a chair, voice bitter, mouth drooping, he will not have a chance to get the part—unless the manager is casting a morbid Russian drama.

5. *How Is Your Health?*

In theatrical work, your office hours are from 8:30 P.M. to 11:30 P.M., and to the average person that sounds like an easy life. But think it over! During the run of a play you may rest at home all day, but the moment you set foot in the theater you put yourself through a period, physically, emotionally, and mentally, that is equal to twenty hours' work in any business. In those few short hours every faculty must be sharpened until it functions faultlessly. From the time you make your first entrance until the curtain rings down, you are sold to the audience; you must win them and hold them. They have paid their money and are entitled to your best.

Rehearsal periods mean an even greater strain. Long hours, hit-or-miss meals, snatched, irregular sleep, short spurts of difficult acting, long periods of sitting around awaiting your cues. The nervous tension tightens until on opening night you are a nervous wreck. It takes a strong constitution to buck it!

The road (yes, there is still one, thanks to Katharine Cornell, Helen Hayes, and the Lunts) offers another health hazard. Sleeper jumps, lunch-counter meals, unheated dressing rooms, drafty theaters challenge the most robust system.

6. *Have You a Graceful Carriage?*

Do you walk, sit, and rise with ease? If these qualities are lacking, you will have to start an intensive course of posture work, calisthenics, dancing, or fencing. Not a pound overweight; perfectly poised; body control in every muscle—those are the requirements.

7. *Have You a Clear, Well-placed Voice and Good Diction?*

If you haven't, you must learn. And learning takes time, thought, and money.

8. *Have You the Necessary Financial Backing?*

It may be months, or a year, before you get so much as a walk-on part. It is possible to hold other positions while you are making the rounds, but if you are trying to study in the daytime that is an awkward plan. One of the new stars who has been trying for years to get a leading part has made her living by doing fashion newsreel announcing. Many of our young hopefuls are now on the radio telling mother how to mix a cake and junior's formula.

The summer barn theaters offer the student a chance to get experience and very good training in discipline and to learn his business, but these companies pay minimum salaries, and for the nonsubsidized acting student the going is hard.

Acting looks so easy, you say. With your personal analysis before you, how do you feel about your career now? Are you ready to go on? Do you feel that you have real stage timbre? If the analysis has given you proper respect for the acting profession—a respect compounded of fear and admiration—it has done its work. If it has convinced you that acting can be learned but that the learning process never stops, so much the better. For the serious student of the stage is always learning his art, or something that is related to it. Self-satisfaction, a deadly thing to an actor, is never his. He knows he can't afford to be smug.

A young dancing star was surprised and a little hurt when her director told her to take up painting. Too silly! Why should a dancer learn to paint? The director gave her several reasons, off-hand. A knowledge of composition will give her a consciousness of her part in the stage picture (for the stage is a picture framed by the proscenium). It will enable her to present a pleasing pose. Art will help her color and line sense. Many an actress (Lynn Fontanne, for one, Katharine Hepburn, for another) has enhanced her performance by being beautifully costumed. Some knowledge of painting will also assist her in make-up.

A musical training is helpful in any career. Aside from the possibility of being called upon to sing or play some instrument in a play, the development of an actor's musical ear is important. A tone-sensitive ear will tell you whether you speak in a dull monotone or in a rich, rhythmical cadence. To light and shade a speech is something an actor must learn, and how can he learn this if he is tone-deaf?

All the arts—music, painting, sculpture, writing—are inter-related. Whether you bring a knowledge of any or all of them with you or whether you cultivate them later on, they will aid in your development as an actor.

Stage Mechanics

Any art that deals with human emotions must be perfect in craftsmanship. That is why the performance of an experienced actor who understands and can use every intricate mechanical trick of his profession looks so simple and natural. Actually, there's nothing natural about the performance at all; it is skillfully concealed artifice. The natural effect is produced by years of constant work in which the actor has learned how to cover the bare bones of his technique (stage mechanics) with the richness and individuality of his own personality.

When I say that a knowledge of stage mechanics covers seventy per cent of the art of acting, I am not exaggerating. Before the young player can make a professional move on any stage, he must master

these mechanical tricks. With them, he will have a foundation on which to build his career, a practical system that will remain with him during his whole life on the stage. Stage mechanics will give him confidence and assurance that can be acquired in no other way.

In using the word "mechanics," I am not describing a *mechanical form of acting*. Far from it! "Stage mechanics" is a traditional term of the theater, used to describe the conduct and deportment of the actor while he is engaged in the business of acting. The mechanics include walking, use of the hands and eyes, gestures, and movements. Each mechanic is rehearsed so many times that it can be repeated, night after night, without a change. A performance can be ruined by the failure of an actor to repeat his mechanic just as it has been taught to him.

When a player makes an entrance or exit or a cross from one point on the stage to another, the move is a mechanic. If a fight is staged, each blow struck is weighed carefully so that the effect is the same at each performance. This, too, is a mechanic.

The handling of the properties is part of the stage mechanics program. If an actress sits at a table pouring téa for her guests, the teapot, the cups and saucers become hand props because she handles them. The handling of these props is stage business or "mechanics."

Even the breath becomes part of the mechanical setup and must be kept under complete control. A sigh or a pause used at the right moment can have a startling effect on the audience. The wrong movement can be equally startling, in a less happy sense.

Control of the breath is brought about by flexible development of the muscles of the abdomen and the diaphragm. Without this mechanic, an actor's playing can have no vitality, pace, or timing.

The modulation of the voice is also a mechanical process. Every word, every tone we utter must have some motive power behind it. This power is furnished by the diaphragm's bringing pressure from below. Compressing the wind against the vocal cords produces the different tones or sounds. This mechanic is the spring-board for physical vitality in all stage playing.

Diction, another mechanic, concerns voice, lungs, and diaphragm. It also has to do with the muscles of the lips, tongue, throat, and soft palate. Unless all these factors are working in harmony, clear and distinct diction is not possible. And good diction is one of the actor's most important mechanical aids.

No outward form of expression can compare with the combined message of the actor's voice and his eyes. They register delicate and subtle changes of expression. The eyes can carry on a steady conflict, or they can smile; they can show pity, love, hatred. The voice, working in harmony with his eyes, is the lightning flash that reveals to the audience the storm of internal emotions. Television is here, but no man-made instrument will ever be perfected that can compare with this instrument of nature, the eyes, for sending or receiving the sense impression of sight.

The language of the hands is universal in its meaning. The simplest and crudest emotions are expressed almost invariably in the same manner. But the variations of a gesture are determined by the individual personality of the performer. Seldom do any two actors use exactly the same gesture to depict any given emotion. For instance, there are many moves or gestures that express fear. Each actor has his own conception of the expression of fear, and the gesture he usually chooses is the one to use.

To be able to move and walk gracefully is a stage mechanic that every young actor must acquire. All individual movement on the stage is under the close scrutiny of the audience. We practice to gain rhythm and poise.

All these mechanics represent the physical side of acting. In addition, there are mental and emotional mechanics that concern our inner state. But before we can get below the surface to interpret the emotions that are on the inside, we must have the physical mechanics under complete control.

Were I to discuss all these factors at once, the result would be too complicated to understand. Therefore, in the first chapters of this book, I shall dissect and analyze each physical stage mechanic so that each one—voice or movements or eyes or diction or hands

—can be studied separately and practiced until it becomes the actor's own.

When, by faithful practice, the physical mechanics are handled perfectly by the player, he will be happy to find that the mental mechanics, such as imagination, observation, and the thought process, and the emotional mechanics, cause, impression, and effect, are working in perfect harmony with the physical mechanics.

When the actor's mental and emotional sides take charge of his performance, he will not have to ponder on what gesture to use or ask himself what reaction will fit this or that situation. The physical action will be under complete control of the actor's mental and emotional consciousness. Every bit of behavior will fly into place, literally suiting the action to the word.

We all know that emotion is simply a physiological state. It is something inside our mental and physical being, and outward expression must come through the voice, the eyes, the hands, and the body. An emotion can use one or all of these outlets simultaneously. They are the instruments that give outward expression of our inner consciousness. They are the reflection of what is happening inside our minds.

In every good actor these instruments are fully developed. They are the tools of his trade.

In Shakespeare's speech to the players in "Hamlet," any actor will find a complete lesson in stage mechanics.

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue [clear diction]; but if you mouth it, as many of your players do [articulation], I had as lief the town crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus [gestures too broad or grotesque]; but use all gently [with artistry]: For in the very torrent, tempest, and—as I may say—the whirlwind of passion [battle of the emotions], you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give smoothness [delicate shading]. O! it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags

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When, by faithful practice, the physical mechanics are handled perfectly by the player, he will be happy to find that the mental mechanics, such as imagination, observation, and the thought process, and the emotional mechanics, cause, impression, and effect, are working in perfect harmony with the physical mechanics.

When the actor's mental and emotional sides take charge of his performance, he will not have to ponder on what gesture to use or ask himself what reaction will fit this or that situation. The physical action will be under complete control of the actor's mental and emotional consciousness. Every bit of behavior will fly into place, literally suiting the action to the word.

We all know that emotion is simply a physiological state. It is something inside our mental and physical being, and outward expression must come through the voice, the eyes, the hands, and the body. An emotion can use one or all of these outlets simultaneously. They are the instruments that give outward expression of our inner consciousness. They are the reflection of what is happening inside our minds.

In every good actor these instruments are fully developed. They are the tools of his trade.

In Shakespeare's speech to the players in "Hamlet," any actor will find a complete lesson in stage mechanics.

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue [clear diction]; but if you mouth it, as many of your players do [articulation], I had as lief the town crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus [gestures too broad or grotesque]; but use all gently [with artistry]: For in the very torrent, tempest, and—as I may say—the whirlwind of passion [battle of the emotions], you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give smoothness [delicate shading]. O! it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags

[[a physical force]], to split the ears of the groundlings, who, for the most part, are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise:

. . . Be not too tame neither [[don't underplay]], but let your own discretion be your tutor [[let your sensibilities guide you]]: suit the action to the word, the word to the action [[synchronize the words with your body movement]]; with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature [[restraint]] . . . to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. Now, this overdone, or come tardy off [[timing]], though it make the unskilful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve; [[critics]] the censure of the which one must, in your allowance, o'erweigh a whole theatre of others O! there be players that I have seen play, and heard others praise, and that highly, not to speak it profanely, that, neither having the accent of Christians nor the gait of Christian, pagan, nor man, have so strutted and bellowed [[ham; overdone]] that I have thought some of nature's journeymen had made men and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably [[character]].

. . . And let them that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them [[no ad libbing]]; for there be of them that will themselves laugh [[don't laugh at your own jokes]], to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too, though in the meantime some necessary question of the play be then to be considered; that's villainous, and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it. Go, make you ready [[be ready for your entrance cue!]].

In addition to writing beautiful English prose, the famous bard has taken the pains to cover the whole business of acting: voice, diction, enunciation, gesture, acting—under- and overdone (one is as bad as the other), characterization, and ad libbing, which, for present purposes, we shall call “speaking out of turn.”

In one short lesson, Shakespeare has incorporated the heart and soul of acting. For over three hundred years it has been the first page in every actor's primer.

Which part of this advice applies to you? You may need the entire course of training, in which case you have a stiff program ahead of

you. You may need voice control or the study of body movement or work on characterization or stage locations or make-up.

But whatever your need, whether it is great or small, you'll find it listed under the name of "stage mechanics." And it is these mechanics that I shall discuss in detail, with full exercises for cause and cure, in the chapters that follow.

Stage Locations

IN NEW HAVEN, during a road tour of a Winter Garden show, I sent out a call for extras to impersonate sheiks for one of the big chorus numbers. The local college answered in a body, and from the group I selected a number of fine, well-built lads.

Wrapped in burnouses, the boys knelt, backs to the audience, facing the sinking sun. "Oh, Allah be praised!" they were taught to chant. "Oh, Allah be praised!"

At the close of the number, a transparent scrim curtain was dropped on the sheiks, masking them from the audience and setting the scene for a desert sandstorm effect that was to follow.

On the opening night, all went well until the transparent curtain started to fall. Then the stage manager saw that the boys were kneeling too far downstage to be masked by the curtain. In a second the scrim would go down, and the amateur sheiks, kneeling and chanting, would remain ludicrously exposed to the audience while the desert storm blew on its way.

"Upstage! Upstage!" yelled the excited manager, urging the extras gradually to work up a little on their knees. But the order missed fire. The college boys heard the call and applied it, literally, to their lines.

"Oh, Allah, upstage!" they chanted. "Oh, Allah, upstage!"

The stage, with its shifting scenery and crew of hands, actors, and directors, all of whom speak a language of their own, is a strange world to the new actor. And yet it is a world he enters without map or guidebook—a thing he'd never think of doing on going to a foreign country. At least he'd prepare himself in advance with a practical knowledge of the topography of the land and the language of the natives before he ventured on his journey.

The stage is divided into sections, and each has its own special designation. This is true of any stage, whether it be erected in one of the modern Times Square theaters, in a small-town opera house or auditorium, or even, as in the old barnstorming days, in a tent or barn. When you read in a part (in parenthesis) X.U.L. or D.C. or U.R.C., you are getting stage directions, the little road signs that you must recognize and be able to follow without hesitation.

For instance, you can't afford to wait and think over this particular stage mechanic, as did one little girl who was trying out for me. I asked her to please get off "the apron" (the strip of stage just behind the footlights). She stuttered and blushed and finally confessed in an agony of confusion, "But I *haven't* any apron. Should I have one?"

It has been said that poise is a matter of knowing where you are going, and this principle applies to the stage just as surely as to the drawing room. If the actor is thoroughly familiar with each stage location, it stands to reason that his movements will suggest poise and self-assurance. Half the battle against amateur appearance will be won when he has learned to move with directness of purpose.

Before we go into the intricacies of stage crosses (movements from one part of the stage to another), we'll begin by familiarizing ourselves with certain stage locations, or positions, as they are called.

Stage Right (*designated in the script as R*) is always located on the actor's right as he faces the footlights.

Stage Left (*designated in the script as L*) is always opposite, or on the actor's left as he faces the footlights.

The part of the stage nearest the audience, or footlights, is called "downstage." The part farthest away from the footlights is called "upstage." This term originated in the old-fashioned theater, where the floor sloped sharply toward the footlights.

A stage cross can be made from left to right or vice versa. It can be upstage or downstage, in oblique line or straight. Usually a stage cross begins from a position in which the player is engaged in conversation with another character or group of characters. He may be facing the character or group, with his side to the audience, or turned three-quarters so that he is partly facing the audience and group at the same time. This will necessitate a slight turn as he begins the movement across the stage.

Example: Suppose you are on the right of a group standing Center Stage. You want to make a cross to Stage Right. To do so, it is necessary to make a slight turn to your right as the movement begins, since before you start you are facing the left wall.

If your cross is to Stage Left, the slight turn will not be necessary, since you are facing in the direction toward which you are going.

When rehearsing at home or in any place other than a regular stage, always locate the audience or footlights in your imagination, and *face the footlights*. Immediately you will know which is Stage Right and which is Stage Left.

If the room is oblong, use the length to locate the audience. You will need the width of the room for Stage Crosses.

EXERCISES

The following exercises, which are a sort of springboard for every stage movement, should be practiced daily.

1. Stand with the feet about a foot apart, the hands on the hips. Shift the hips to the right until you feel the weight of the body on the right foot. Stop. Shift back to the first position. Use the hips only.

2. Shift the hips to the left until you feel the weight of the body on the left foot. Stop. Shift back to the first position. Use the hips only.

3. From the first position shift the hips to the right, then to the left, in one continuous movement. Make the hips describe a circle.

4. From the first position shift the hips to the left, then to the right in one continuous movement. Make the hips describe a circle.

If followed faithfully, these movements will make your hips flexible. At the start the method of shifting your body will seem crude and awkward. Later, when you become familiar with its use, the movement will be so smooth and natural that no one will be aware of its use.

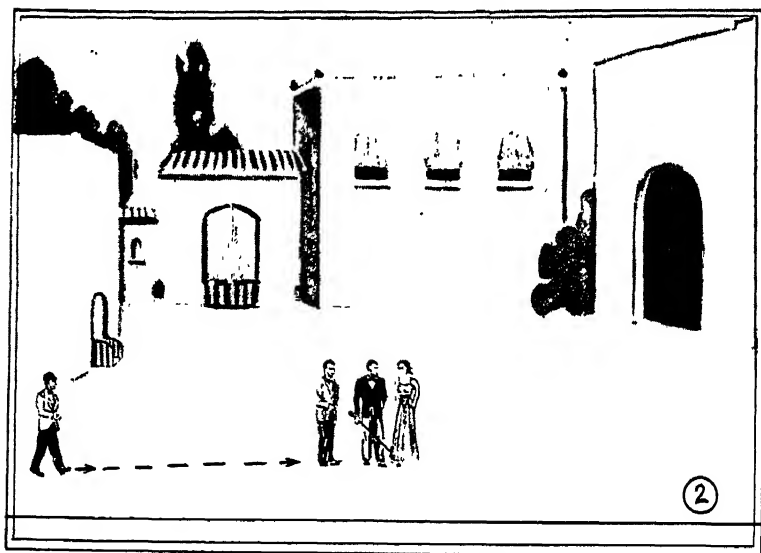
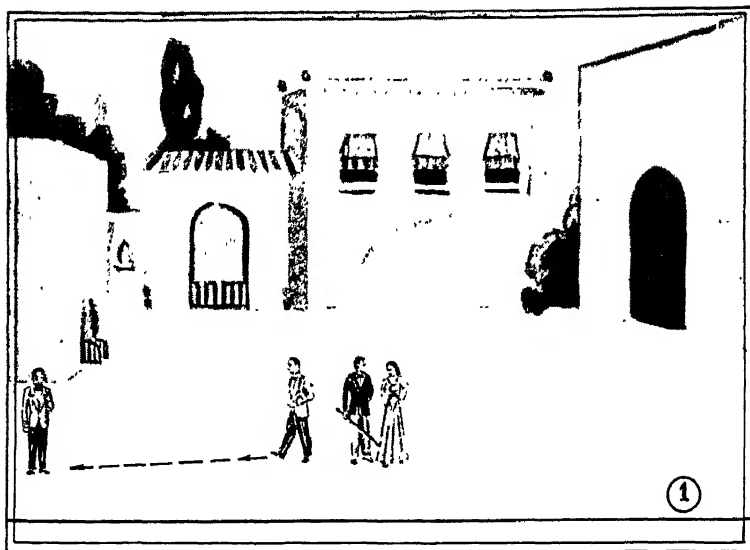
5. Shift the weight onto the left leg. Turn slightly to right and step out on the right foot. Walk seven steps to the right.

6. Shift the weight onto the right leg. Turn slightly to the left and step out on the left foot. Walk seven steps.

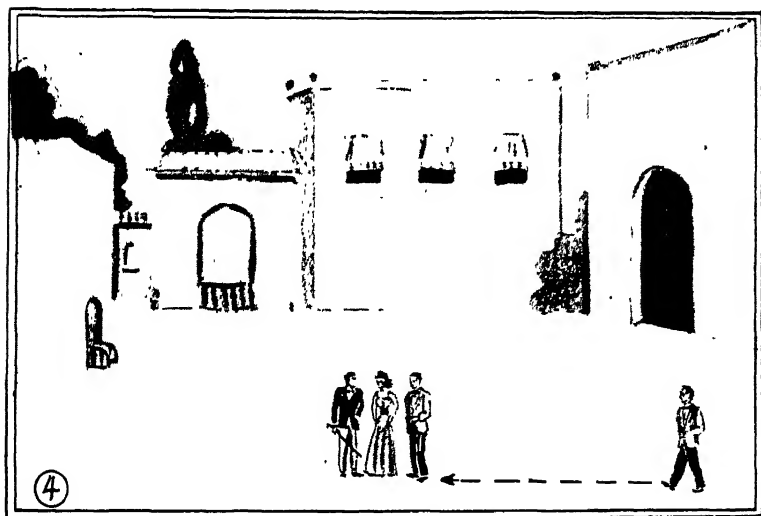
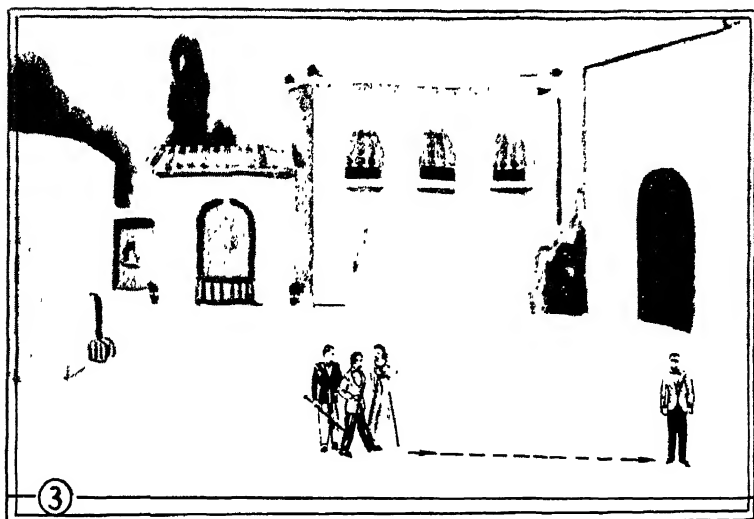
7. Combine the two movements in order to walk right and left. Seven counts each way. As you make the shift on the seventh count, there is a slight hesitation. Walk easily and gracefully.

8. Walk to a chair. Sit down. Don't slump. Get up. Step on the left foot and walk to the left. If you are moving to the left as you get up, use the left foot. If to the right, the right foot.

In making a move or a cross on the stage, always step out on the foot that is nearer your destination.



1. Right cross from right of group.
2. Left cross to right of group.



3. Left cross from right of group.

4. Right cross to left of group.

1. *Right Cross from Right of Group Center to Right*

Face the footlights, with the feet about a foot apart. Sway slightly to the left and with the hip movement shift the weight onto the left foot. Turn slightly to the right and step out on the right foot. Face the right wall and walk to the right. Take seven steps and stop, facing the footlights.

2. *Left Cross to Right of Group Center*

Face the footlights, with the feet about a foot apart. Sway slightly to the right and with hip movement shift the weight onto the right foot. Turn slightly to the left and step out on the left foot. Face the left wall and walk to the left. Take seven steps and stop, facing the footlights. You are back to the original position.

3. *Left Cross from Right of Group Center*

Face the footlights, with the feet about a foot apart. Sway slightly to the right and with hip movement shift the weight onto the right foot. Step onto the left foot and walk to the left. Take seven steps. Stop, facing the footlights. You are now over left of stage.

4. *Right Cross from Over Left to Left of Group Center*

Face the footlights, with the feet about a foot apart. Sway slightly to the left and with hip movement shift the weight onto the left foot. Step onto the right foot and walk to the right. Take seven steps. Stop at the left of the group in center.

5. *Right Cross*

Face the footlights, with the feet about a foot apart. Sway slightly to the left and with hip movement shift the weight onto the left foot. Step out with the right foot and walk seven steps to stage right. Stop, facing the footlights.

6. *Left Cross to Right of Group*

Face the footlights, with the feet about a foot apart. Sway slightly to the right and with hip movement shift the weight onto

the right foot. Turn slightly to the left. Step on the left foot and walk seven steps to the right of the group center. Stop, facing the footlights.

7. *Upstage Cross*

Face the footlights at the right of the group, with the feet about a foot apart. Sway slightly to the left. Shift the weight onto the left foot. Turn slightly upstage. Step on the right foot and walk seven steps upstage right. Stop with your back to the audience.

These moves I have divided into seven steps in order that the feet, in each instance, may fall in the correct position for the next move. This word of caution applies to the practice period merely. Eventually you will be able to make the same moves without counting.

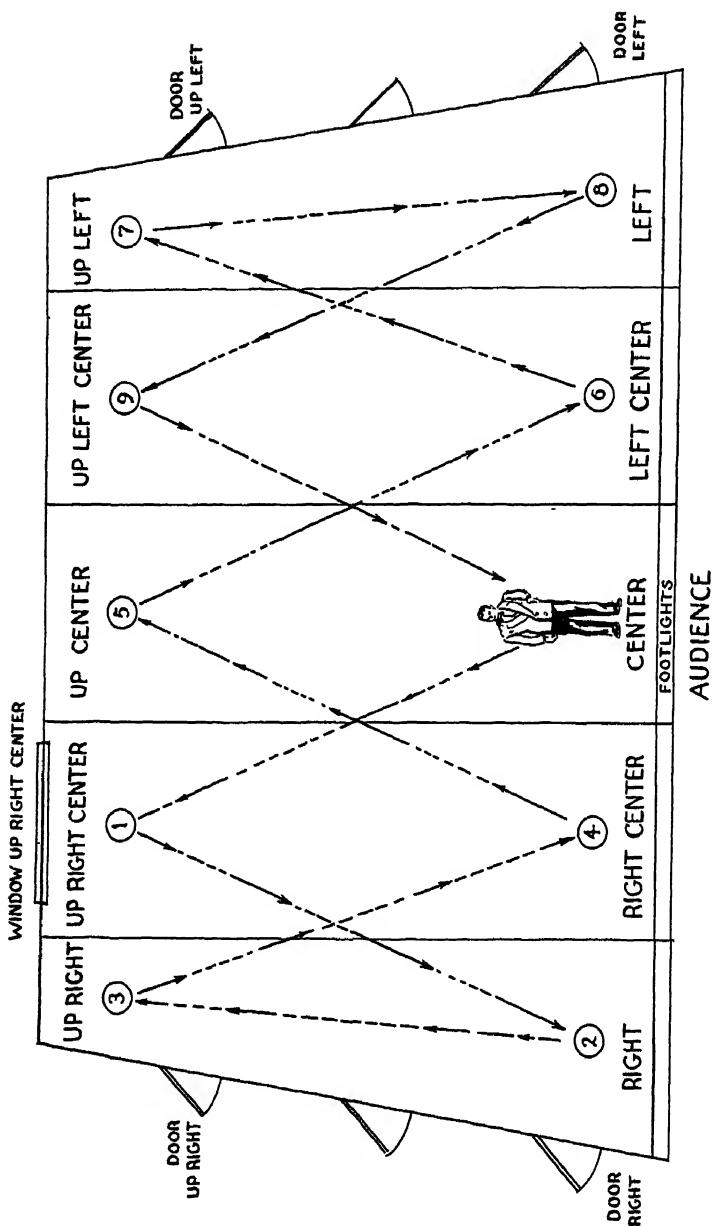
If you are making a right cross, naturally you step out on the right foot. The purpose of the shift you have been practicing is to get you on that foot in an easy and graceful manner. The same rule applies to the left foot. To start a right cross on your left foot and a left cross on your right would be awkward.

Always start with the foot that is nearer your destination. At first you will practice the shift with a wide movement, thereby making the movement seem exaggerated. Later, as you become proficient in the use of the shift, you will reduce the movement until it is so smooth that it cannot be noticed.

Now you have an understanding of what is meant by Stage Left and Stage Right, by Upstage and Downstage. You know the right of stage is always on the actor's right as he faces the footlights; that the left of stage is always on his left. These positions never change.

To give you a clearer understanding of stage locations, I have divided with lines the chart of the stage. I have added Center. Right of Center and Left of Center. There are Upstage, extreme Right and Left, as well as Downstage. With five minutes' study,

24 · STAGE LOCATIONS



Stage locations.

any young actor should be able to walk to or from any of these positions.

Choose a room for rehearsals. Take the chart and set the stage: You will find five Upstage positions and five Downstage positions.

Right
Right center
Center
Left center
Left

Mark these positions with chairs or any markers that are handy, but *be sure to mark the positions before you begin*. (The positions may be marked with pieces of paper.)

If you have given serious thought and practice to the methods of shifting your weight in the last exercises, you will have no trouble in walking these positions. Certainly, if you have stuck to the task, you know the correct foot to start on!

1. *Cross Upstage to Right Center (Oblique Cross Upstage)*

Face the footlights in center of stage. Sway left. Turn up right. Step on the right foot. Walk in an oblique line to Right Center. Stop with your back three-quarters to the footlights.

2. *Cross Downstage to Right (Oblique Cross)*

Sway right. Step on the left foot. Walk in an oblique line to the right. Stop, facing three-quarters to the footlights.

3. *Cross Upstage to Right (Straight Cross Upstage)*

Sway left. Turn up right. Step on the right foot. Walk upstage in a straight line to the right. Stop with your back to the footlights.

4. *Cross Downstage to Right Center (Oblique Cross)*

Sway left. Turn downstage right. Step on the right foot. Walk downstage in an oblique line to right center. Stop, facing three-quarters to the left.

5. *Cross Upstage to Center (Oblique Cross)*

Sway right. Turn upstage left. Step on the left foot. Walk upstage in an oblique line to upstage center. Stop, facing upstage.

6. *Cross Downstage to Left Center (Oblique Cross)*

Sway left. Turn downstage right. Step on the right foot. Walk downstage in an oblique line to left center. Stop, facing three-quarters left.

7. *Cross Upstage to Left (Oblique Cross)*

Sway right. Turn upstage left. Step on the left foot. Walk upstage in an oblique line to the left. Stop with your back three-quarters to footlights.

8. *Cross Downstage to Left (Straight Cross)*

Sway left. Turn downstage right. Step on the right foot. Walk downstage in a straight line to the left. Stop, facing the footlights.

9. *Cross Upstage to Left Center (Oblique Cross)*

Sway left. Turn upstage right. Step on the right foot. Walk upstage in an oblique line to left center. Stop with your back three-quarters to footlights.

10. *Cross Downstage to Center (Oblique Cross)*

Sway to the right. Turn downstage to the left. Step on the left foot. Walk downstage in an oblique line to center, facing the footlights.

In these movements, you have covered every position on the stage. If you have followed directions, you should be back on the spot from which you started.

Now continue the practice of making stage crosses. Make up your mind to master every move, so that when you arrive at your first rehearsal you will know just where you are going. You may be sure that the director will expect you to know!

When you feel that you have the crosses well set in your memory, get a published play in which all the stage business is marked. Select one of the parts and study it. Make all the moves indicated. Better still, if you have a friend who is also interested in the theater, rehearse one of the scenes with him!

“Taking the Stage”

In the old days, when a director told an actor—usually the star—to “take the stage,” he was inviting the player to move to the center of the stage, the most prominent of all locations, and, standing there, to *act*! And if you remember those more robust days, the acting was best described by the word “flamboyant.”

Now, the term “take the stage” is modified by both the director’s wishes and the actor’s discretion. The modern actor, on hearing the direction “take the stage,” is intelligent enough to know locations; he would not go to the center, particularly if other actors were grouped there. He would walk across the stage, move away from the group a little, and make his speech.

The move gives him freedom of expression—a chance to use his own idea of how a scene should be played. It also gives the scene action at a time when no action has been written in the script.

“Dressing the Stage”

When a stage seems bare, often the director calls, “Dress the stage.” Whereupon the actors and actresses distribute themselves about the stage to relieve the bareness. Instead of a group of five or six people huddled upstage, the players break themselves into smaller groups downstage. This makes a better stage composition. The call, “Dress the stage,” occurs frequently in scenes involving chorus work.

“Upstaging”

Usually when two people are standing downstage playing a scene, they are facing either three-quarters or directly to the audience. In this manner, their lines can be heard, and the audience can catch the facial reactions. If the first actor either unconsciously

or deliberately shifts his position a little upstage, he forces the second actor to turn his back to the audience, thereby causing him to sacrifice both the distinctness of his lines and his facial expressions.

This is called "upstaging," and, if done intentionally, is a mean and unethical trick.

I had my first taste of "upstaging" as a green young stock actor at the old La Salle Theater in Chicago. The old-timer opposite whom I played decided to show me a few tricks I'd missed. The first night he "upstaged" me I didn't know just what was wrong. But I did know I was playing the entire scene with my back to the audience. The next night I reported early and had a little talk with the director. I told him I had a plan I wanted to try out. Very much amused, he told me to go right ahead.

When we went into our scene during the performance, my friend began working upstage just a shade. I moved, too. Again and again I went with him. Each time I moved his face got redder. In the wings some of the rest of the cast, as well as the director, watched the battle. When the other actor and I were almost flattened against the backdrop, I saw surrender in his eyes. He never upstaged me again!

Entrances

Although the old style "grand entrance" or prima donna entrance in which the entire company turned upstage, backs to the audience, to hail the star as she swept down a flight of pseudo-marble stairs has gone its way, a leading player is seldom discovered on stage as the curtain rises. In modern plays, interest in a leading character is built up by the author's lines. By the time he or she makes a first entrance, the audience knows pretty well what to expect, for, other characters have purposely been put on the stage to lay the groundwork of the plot and the character action.

A vivid first impression usually remains with us, and a wise actor knows this. Who could forget Lynn Fontanne's smooth, poised entrance as the worldly Irene in "Idiot's Delight"? Or Helen Hayes' timid, childlike entrance as the young princess who

had been hastily summoned from her bed to be acclaimed queen of England in "Victoria Regina"?

Exits

The old vaudeville saying, "Always leave them laughing," was based on sound psychology. Many an individual performance has been remembered by a snappy exit line.

When a character makes an exit on a speech, he breaks up the sentence or times it so that he can get the full benefit of the last words. This usually means that part of the line is delivered downstage, while the next thought carries him to the door or exit. Then, as though suddenly remembering something he hasn't said, the actor delivers the climax of his line. This brings emphasis and sharpness to the delivery.

The traditional name for a scene of this kind is "conventional exit." By the less respectful, it is sometimes referred to as a "door-knob exit," because often the actor is in the act of opening the door as he leaves.

EXAMPLE

Scene from "The Three Musketeers," by William Anthony McGuire

In a street scene of "The Three Musketeers," those inseparable adventurers, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, discuss their respective virtues.

ARAMIS

I flatter myself that in my humble way I do my duty as a Musketeer.

PORTHOS

What is a Musketeer's duty?

ARAMIS

To fight.

PORTHOS

To love.

ATHOS

To drink. And I'll do my duty now! (*He exits left into the inn*)

Not only is that a good exit line, expressive of character, but it also has two distinct laughs.

There are three ways in which Athos might deliver this exit. Standing down center stage, he might say to Porthos and Aramis, "To drink. And I'll do my duty now." Then wheel about and exit.

Athos might start walking directly on the line. However, not only would this dissipate the strength of the line, because it has two separate thoughts, but the sound of the words would blur, because, while walking, he would be forced to turn his back partly to the audience.

Or Athos might stand center stage and say the first part of the line, "To drink." Perhaps he would lick his lips, rub his stomach, or make some other suggestive gesture. He could gaze longingly at the inn, walk a few steps toward it. Now he would have put over his first point and gained his laugh. Then, as though the very mention of the word precluded any further thought of it, he might add, "And I'll do my duty now!" and march directly to the inn.

This last method is the best. The actor has separated the two thoughts, suited the action to the word, and kept the movement clean-cut.

"Do you know where you are going?"

How often I've had to stop rehearsals long enough to put that question to a bewildered young actor, who, stiff with fright, had lost his stage position and, inevitably, his voice and body control. My password, some of the players call it, but in reality it is a kind of answer to an SOS sent out by the helpless beginner.

For in almost every instance, proper orientation, in so far as stage locations are concerned, has enabled the player to go on with his lines in acceptable fashion. So I say to you, before you start to study any of the fine points of acting, learn stage locations. Be sure you know where you are going!

The Business of Acting

An actor is as good as his ability to convince the audience that he is the character he is playing.

At a performance of the Paul Vincent Carroll play, "Shadow and Substance," I watched the response of a woman in the audience to the acting of Sir Cedric Hardwicke. Every time Hardwicke, as the brilliant, caustic canon, made an entrance, she said under her breath, "Isn't he terrible! Oh, how I hate him!"

The woman was not seeing Cedric Hardwicke, the man and actor who played the part. She was seeing the cruel, bigoted church official and was disliking him with all her heart—which was exactly Sir Cedric's purpose: to arouse her hatred of the canon.

For an audience to hiss a villain is a very good sign. It means that the actor has so submerged his own personality in the character of the man he is playing that the audience forget he is probably a thoroughly respectable citizen and think of him only as an archcrook out to do no good. The watchers so identify themselves with the sympathetic character whose happiness is threatened by the villain that they prepare themselves, emotionally, at least, to do battle in his behalf. They form a rousing antagonism for the player of the unsympathetic part.

This is real acting—the putting forth of power, bodily and mental, to produce a strong effect. Good acting is the ability not only to fulfill

the playwright's conception of the character but to go beyond this conception, to fill in the gaps, and, by the actor's personal approach, give human realism to the part.

Learning to Act

I have said there is no mystery in the business of acting. At first glance, it seems a complicated and perplexing thing, but that is true of first acquaintance with any art. We are inclined to make comparisons with perfection. We forget that it has taken years of study and practice to attain that perfection.

The expert watchmaker knows each piece of delicate machinery that goes into the making of a watch. He understands just where each tiny part belongs and the duty it performs. To him there is no mystery or chance in the process by which the second hand ticks off the seconds with precision. He is aware of the means whereby the watch registers the twenty-four hours of the day.

This knowledge, the result of a long period of study and apprenticeship, enables the watchmaker to assemble all the parts into a flawless working system. In it there is no guesswork; it is based on scientific principles.

And so it is with acting.

Science is knowledge reduced to a law and embodied in system.

Art is the development of that system through the personal equipment of the artist. Thus the actor, in learning his profession, must gain a thorough knowledge of the elementary principles of acting. And, having acquired this knowledge, he must learn the *technique* of revealing the principles to his audience.

What Is Technique?

Technique is the mechanical presentation of the intricate details of any art.

A writer studies rhetoric and composition. Then he conceives an idea. In order to express this idea in clear, readable English, he must conform to the discipline of writing technique; otherwise he will have a meaningless jumble of words. Furthermore, in order to

sway his readers emotionally, he must use deliberate tricks in the selection of his phraseology.

In writing, this technique is called "style"; in music, it is called "phrasing." A singer learns trills, cadenzas, and chromatics before he can apply them to the rendering of an aria. A pianist studies counterpoint and harmony before he forms chords and arpeggios; he must always conform to the limits of the keyboard.

An artist has certain primary colors that he may blend, after long practice, to suit his taste.

And so must the actor master technique before his emotional strength can come through.

Applying Technique

Eva Le Gallienne has said, "It takes the first ten years of acting to get your technique and the second ten years to get control of your emotions so that you can call upon them and be sure they will respond."

No good acting is done unless there is a clear picture in the mind of the actor of just how he is going to take the steps necessary to make his character portrayal lucid and artistic. Acting technique is most practical and important as it explains the operation step by step.

When you are trying to impress an audience with some aspect of character, not only must you put the idea in graphic form, through body movements, voice, and gestures, but you yourself must be sure why each movement or gesture or voice intonation is made. It is just as important to do this in acting as it is in putting together a watch. Technique has a firm, practical relation to the acting problem.

The actor must be just as precise in his methods as the watchmaker is in his, making it clear to himself as well as to his audience that he knows how the character feels.

As soon as the actor has developed technical assurance, he will find that his acting is so crisp and accurate that the audience gets

his ideas more easily. Furthermore, he will have more abundant ideas himself as to how the character should be played. But he will not be able to use the ideas on the stage until he has become sure of their use in practice.

To go back to the watchmaker. On the table before him are placed the parts of the watch. These are studied, manipulated, considered in reverie. Before the various parts are assembled, the watchmaker is sure that he understands the process of putting them together. Just such a plan is needed in the actor's thinking to avoid a jumbled effect. He must form the habit of bringing together all his bits of technique—body control, use of hands, voice, eyes, make-up—before he assembles the essential parts of his acting.

Now, before you start your own study of acting technique, let us see how much you know about the profession you have selected.

Close your eyes.

Let every kind of idea float through your mind without any attempt at coherence. Such material concerning acting may be gathered from personal experience, memory of what others have told you, or what you have read. Important or trivial, make the idea your own.

Then write down the chapter headings of this book:

Body Grace
 Language of the Hands
 Use of the Eyes
 Breath Control
 Voice Training
 Diction
 Laughter and Tears
 Emotional Spontaneity
 How to Study a Part
 Make-up
 Characterization
 Stage Location

How much do you know about each one?

Concentrate, and then write down how much you know.

The Acting Process

There are four steps by which you can learn acting intelligently:

1. Plan
2. Technique
3. Motion
4. Style

The playwright conceives the *plan* of a play; the director endeavors to carry out his ideas. He directs the player according to the pattern of the playwright, plus his own artistic ideas.

Technique is the mechanical device by which to present the plan; a means for facilitating the playwright's purpose.

Motion is the emotional force in the actor himself, the feeling, conviction, passion, the high enthusiasm, the burning power. He is forced to act according to his nature, his *own* idea of the plan. But he uses technique in so doing.

Style is the *way* the actor portrays character, the personal contribution he makes. The style he uses in acting determines the strength of his playing. If he is alert and intelligent, his style will make an important contribution to his acting. If he is cold and listless, his negative performance will destroy his chance to connect emotionally with his audience.

Acting, then, includes

1. A clear plan
2. Adequate technique
3. Powerful motion
4. Good style

I once asked a well-known dramatic actress whether she really *felt* the part she was playing.

"You *know* I don't," she replied. "If I felt the part completely, I'd forget my lines."

The actress was not speaking the truth, and she would be the first to admit it if the question were analyzed and restated. Asking it in reverse, "Are you faking your performance?" would bring a loud and indignant protest. Faking it? *Never!*

Here is what happened.

After three hundred performances of the same part, it was so much her own that the actress didn't realize how deeply she was *feeling* every line of it. She had forgotten her original conception of the character, her careful interpretation of the woman's psychology, her gestures, the nuances of her voice. She had reached the point of perfection where technique was so blended with performance that the two were one. No trace of her technique was visible.

And that is what technique is for—to be learned and then forgotten.

The Evolution of Acting

I have said an actor is as good as his ability to convince his audience that he is the character he is playing.

Then why do some actors with a moderate amount of ability and average good looks and intelligence push ahead to the top and others remain in the same circumstances in which they began their careers?

The answer lies in the actor's own attitude toward *the relation between himself and his part*.

This curious relationship is the determining factor in much of stage failure or success. In the theater, there is much less luck or, as the actors call it, "the breaks," than the layman may think. Fate may smile graciously on a few and frown ominously on others, but she is far more likely to smile when the actor understands where his own sensitive ego leaves off and the business of acting begins.

Before he reaches the happy state of the seasoned performer, the average actor goes through three phases:

1. *Underdone acting* (the awkward beginner)
2. *Overdone acting* (the perennial "ham")
3. *Well-done acting* (the true artist)

The new player is nervous, shy, self-conscious, and greatly concerned with what everyone will think of him.

He has a dozen things to remember: how to make his entrance; where to go on the stage and how to get there (without bumping into the furniture and other actors); how to use props; what vocal tones, inflections, and volume to use; whether his make-up is correct; how to synchronize voice and movements and, at the same time, try to give a correct interpretation of his individual part with some idea of its relationship to the play as a whole.

The director says, "Play natural!" and when the actor does so, he is told, "Speak up! Don't whisper!"

When he stands still or strikes a pose of nonchalant ease, he is advised by the director not to be a stick. And when he strides around the stage, he is told to stand still and stop galloping about.

No wonder he is confused! Who wouldn't be? There, beyond the footlights, a thousand eyes are watching his fumbling efforts. He is apologetic and humble. He'd better be good—or else!

Each night the actor learns a new trick. The star of the play has remarkably agile eyebrows. If the gift of moving them about is good enough for the featured player, it is good enough for him. He jots it down in his memory.

The leading man makes generous use of his hands. The gestures fascinate the new player. He watches the old-timer go through his movements and makes note of them. When he plays in Shakespeare, he listens to the actor's voice effects. These, too, he makes his own.

Eventually the beginner accumulates a bag of tricks. And about this time he reaches the second phase of acting.

Overdone Acting. The Show-off

(A "Ham" Actor Is Born)

Why bother to collect a bag of tricks if you don't use them? Without thought or discrimination, the actor in this phase gives all he has to his audience.

If he has the line of a messenger boy, "Telegram for you, sir. Shall I wait for an answer?" he stalks down center stage like Hamlet, throws dramatic intonation in his voice, and screws his eyebrows in knots.

The actor wants to be noticed—in fact, he demands to be noticed. If you don't like this trick, he knows others (and is likely to give them at the next performance). He is a personality actor, not an artist. His voice, his walk, and his eyebrows do not match. He is not a messenger boy; he is an exhibitionist.

He is playing "to" his audience, not "for" his audience, and there is a vast difference between the two. In trying to catch the audience, the actor loses them. What he does not yet know is that if he plays the character with intelligence and appreciation of his own small part in the continuity of the play, he may gain their interest.

For instance, if he breezes in, chewing gum vigorously, winks at the stenographer, whisks off his cap (inside of which he carries the telegram), and speaks his line with a "Dead End" twang, he will be in character, and the audience will accept him as such.

In his eagerness to get an effect over, the actor in this phase is inclined to overdo everything. Instead of taking two steps, as he is told, he takes ten. When he is told to lift his hand, he makes a swooping gesture. In short, he leaves nothing to the imagination of the audience (and don't forget that the audience, although obviously passive, is actually participating in the performance—it will react to suggestion and implication just as well as to blunt statement).

The show-off, unfortunately, gives all!

His sensitive ego, which has wilted under the frustrations and pain of the first stage of acting, now blooms too lavishly. Although he isn't aware of it, he is actually more concerned with getting even with his hurt feelings than he is in putting over a good performance. That is why he rants and raves. Furthermore, he is

terrified of failure, and the greater his terror the louder his voice and the more flamboyant his gestures.

Scratch a pulpit pounder and you'll find a speaker afraid of his power of oratory. Tap a loud-voiced, stalking player and you'll discover a timid, quaking mouse!

Acting Well Done

When the actor stops paying attention to *how he feels* about his audience's reaction to his acting, he is well on his way to the third phase of acting, which I have called "well done."

The actor belongs behind the footlights, and there his mind should rest. When he starts wondering and speculating how much the audience likes or does not like him, he loses control of his performance. He'll know soon enough how the audience feels about him. Applause, laughter—and sometimes silence (which is often more eloquent than applause) will reveal the audience's response.

The new player has gone through the first stage of his experiment. He has lost the timidity, which is that of a young child learning to walk. He has learned too much in too short a time, perhaps, and tried to use it all at once, and hence, he has spent a period in the second, overdone stage of acting. (Some actors never leave it!)

And now he has reached the third phase.

An extraordinary transformation has come into his acting. He has been struggling blindly and hopelessly, and suddenly he finds himself going ahead in his work with incredible speed. He feels that a miracle has happened.

But there is no miracle.

There is a change in the actor's relationship between himself and his acting. His attitude is now positive instead of negative. Once he has made this step, he begins to move ahead and do things, and he knows for the first time what real acting is about.

The new player is now willing to forget his personal pride and self-consciousness; he looks at his part from an entirely new viewpoint. He is no longer *personally* concerned but is simply the instrument necessary to create the part.

When an actor looks at himself from the outside with courage, he knows for the first time the real joy of acting. Immediately he steps into the creative process and begins to grow. When this happens to an actor, his work becomes a finished art, and his fears depart.

No actor can mistake it when once he has experienced this kind of growth. It always comes to the actor who has at last found the secret of *eliminating self* and becoming a medium through which the *best of self* is given to his audience.

In the third phase of acting, the actor recognizes the value of technique and *how* and *when* it should be used. It is his encyclopedia, to be referred to when needed. From it he draws a gesture, a voice sound, a facial expression.

He never makes a move that is false or untimely. He never cries or whines a scene. He controls his emotions with intelligent restraint.

He has learned how to conserve body movements. He knows that a whisper may convey fright just as well as a loud shout. In order to express horror, he need not scream, clutch his hands to his breast, and run about. By simply standing still, his eyes fastened on an object, he may convey the emotion more truly.

If the actor is playing the old captain of a doomed and sinking ship, he realizes that the captain would not moan and wring his hands in despair. Rather he would probably reminisce sentimentally; he might even poke an affectionate joke at the ancient tub that, after thirty years' service, has sprung a leak. Perhaps he would call his men together and drink a toast to the ship. He might even speak to God, thanking him for the splendid years of living on the sea.

Not for a moment would the captain declaim or bewail his fate; the situation is strong enough in itself to move the audience. They will live every second with the captain and pray that a rescue will be effected.

If the playwright decided to add a happy ending, this would be the logical time to spring his dramatic moment—just as hope is at its lowest ebb. When the captain learned that he was not to die after all, he would simply raise his glass, look upward and say,



In creating the role of Queen Victoria in Laurence Housman's "Victoria Regina," Helen Hayes gave the modern American theater not only its finest characterization but also a masterpiece in make-up. (By Courtesy of Life Magazine.)

"Thank you." This simple gesture would produce more real feeling than a scene in which the captain fell on his knees and blubbered, "Thank God, we're saved!"

This is acting well done—and as near perfection as a player can make it.

When a situation in a play has natural power, the actor need not call on too generous treatment. A better effect can be had by underacting.

EXAMPLE

Scene from "Victoria Regina," by Laurence Housman¹

The Queen has been out driving with her husband, Albert. Much to their annoyance, she has refused to allow her ladies to accompany them. They discuss the reason for not being taken. (They think it is because the Queen and her husband have quarreled and wish to be alone.) Then, suddenly, they hear a pistol shot. The ladies see a crowd gathering outside the palace. A third lady-in-waiting rushes into the room to say that the Queen has been shot at.

As the ladies realize the real reason why the Queen has not included them in her drive, they are prostrated. (She knew this was going to happen.) Victoria enters, reproves gently but firmly the two ladies for awaiting her. She tells them she will not need them again that evening. Lady Muriel apologizes, explaining that she did not at first understand the Queen's motive for keeping them at home.

VICTORIA

Of course not. It was not necessary that you should. But now you do. So that will help you to know better another time. Go. Please, Lady Muriel. I don't want you any more now. (*She curtseys and exits, leaving Albert and Victoria alone*)

ALBERT

(*Turning sharply*) Another time!

¹ "Victoria Regina," by Laurence Housman, Charles Scribner's Sons.

VICTORIA

Why, yes, Albert; there may come another time. Why not?

ALBERT

Oh, my dear, my dear! (*He crosses to her*) And you can say that now . . . as if you did not mind if it should come again! (*He sits beside her*) Is that really true?

VICTORIA

Yes, Albert; it was wonderful! For, with you, I felt . . . so safe. . . . Didn't you?

ALBERT

No, Weibchen. I was afraid!

VICTORIA

Afraid?

ALBERT

I was afraid that . . . if he missed one of us, it might be me that he missed. Ah, no, no, no! Do not talk of another time! I could not bear it!

VICTORIA

Oh, Albert, had I thought for a moment that it might be you . . . I couldn't have gone! But that that could happen I did not think!

ALBERT

What a very good thing it was, then, my dear, that you did not think. Queens must not think too much about others . . . only about themselves! (*He kisses her*)

VICTORIA

(*Relaxed*) Dearest! Have I pleased you?

ALBERT

You have more than pleased me. You have behaved . . . like a Queen!

VICTORIA

Then I must go and take off my things. Oh, dear! What a lot of letters I shall have to write now. To Uncle Leopold, and to everybody! (*And with this inconvenience of attempted assassination upon her mind, off she goes, for there is no time to lose*)

How it will interest them. "Just think," I can hear them say, "poor Vicky's been shot at." After all, when one has been shot at, it's worth writing about.

When the Queen reproves her ladies for questioning her judgment, she does so in a dignified but kindly manner. She is fully aware of the possibility of a recurrence of the shooting, but her voice expresses no fear or dramatic resignation . . . merely an acknowledgment that it is bound to happen again. Danger is part of the heritage of a queen. But Albert's voice rises in fear when he repeats, "Another time!" Her response that there may be another time is simple, not melodramatic. She doesn't consider herself a martyr.

Albert's reaction is one of love and intense admiration, almost awe, as he recognizes her courage and gallantry. Victoria, clothed with love, tells him that with him there she could feel no fear. But Albert was afraid. . . . If the bullet had touched her . . . The thought of losing her is unbearable. The Queen is only a woman asking for a compliment from her lover when she says, "Dearest, have I pleased you?"

Receiving Albert's adoring praise, Victoria becomes Queen again. "There are a great many letters to be written," she says.

In this scene, fear for the beloved is the emotion that both feel, but Victoria's fear is tempered by the security of her love. Albert's fear is mixed with admiration for his wife's courage. By breeding and instinct, these two people are gentle and controlled.

The scene would lose its dramatic content if played this way:

Wrong Treatment

The Queen enters dramatically, her attitude betraying her nervousness and fear. When she tells Albert there will be another time, she dramatizes herself, throwing into her voice all the

awareness of the danger of her position. In other words, her attitude is, "I'm a queen and they shoot at me! I must make this great sacrifice." Her voice and manner indicate that she is a helpless martyr to her position.

When Albert responds passionately that, had the bullet reached her he could not bear it, he wrings his hands, paces the floor, and moans. And when Victoria asks whether she has pleased him, she makes a demand for sympathy and a pat on the back. His answer is broad and declamatory. Then, as Victoria leaves Albert to write letters to her relations, she will again be a martyr.

Overplayed in this manner, the scene becomes a weak exaggeration of an episode that is inherently dramatic.

*Scene from Ibsen's "Ghosts"*¹

The nature of this scene is so delicate and emotional in content that it calls for sensitive, restrained acting. Any other kind would bring the risk of ridiculous melodrama.

The emotions of Mrs. Alving, the mother, are mingled shock, horror, love, and a pathetic helplessness in her desire to help her son. At times the emotions force her into physical action, but her behavior is at no time broad or unrestrained.

OSWALD

(Sits on the sofa) Now we will have a little talk, mother.

MRS. ALVING

(She pushes an armchair toward the sofa and sits down close to him) Yes, let us.

OSWALD

And meantime the sun will be rising. And then you will know all. And then I shan't have that dread any longer.

MRS. ALVING

What am I to know?

¹ "Ghosts," by Henrik Ibsen, from *The Best Known Works of Ibsen*, Blue Ribbon Books, Inc.

OSWALD

(*Not listening to her*) Mother, didn't you say, a little while ago, that there was nothing in the world you would not do for me, if I asked you?

MRS. ALVING

Yes, to be sure I said it.

OSWALD

And you'll stick to it, mother?

MRS. ALVING

You may rely on that, my dear and only boy! I have nothing in the world to live for but you alone.

OSWALD

All right, then; now you shall hear. Mother, you have a strong, steadfast mind, I know. Now you are to sit quite still when you hear it.

MRS. ALVING

What dreadful thing can it be . . .

OSWALD

You are not to scream out. Do you hear? Do you promise me that? We'll sit and talk about it quite quietly. Do you promise me this, mother?

MRS. ALVING

Yes, yes; I promise you that. Only speak!

OSWALD

Well, you must know that all this fatigue and my not being able to think of working at all . . . all that is not the illness itself . . .

MRS. ALVING

Then what is the illness itself?

OSWALD

The disease I have as my birthright (*he points to his forehead and adds very softly*) is seated here.

MRS. ALVING

(In a deep whisper of horror) Oswald! No! No!

OSWALD

Don't scream. I can't bear it. Yes, it is sitting here . . . waiting. And it may break out any day . . . at any moment.

MRS. ALVING

Oh! what horror!

OSWALD

No, do be quiet. That's how it stands with me . . .

MRS. ALVING

(Jumps up) It is not true, Oswald. It is impossible. It can't be so!

OSWALD

I have had one attack down there already. It was soon over. But when I got to know what had been the matter with me, then the dread came upon me raging and tearing; and so I set off home to you as fast as I could.

MRS. ALVING

Then this is the dread . . . ?

OSWALD

Yes, for it's so indescribably awful, you know. Oh! If it had been merely an ordinary mortal disease! For I'm not so afraid of death . . . though I should like to live as long as I can.

MRS. ALVING

Yes, yes, Oswald, you must.

OSWALD

But this is so unspeakably loathsome! To become a little baby again! To have to be fed! To have to . . . Oh! I can't speak of it!

MRS. ALVING

The child has his mother to nurse him.

OSWALD

(*Jumps up*) No, never; that's just what I won't have. I can't endure to think that perhaps I should lie in that state for many years . . . get old and gray. And in the meantime you might die and leave me. (*Sits in chair*) For the doctor said it would not necessarily prove fatal at once. He called it a sort of softening of the brain . . . or something of the kind. (*Smiles sadly*) I think that expression sounds so nice. It always sets me thinking of cherry-colored velvet . . . something soft and delicate to stroke. . . .

MRS. ALVING

(*Cries out*) Oswald!

OSWALD

(*Springs up and paces the room*) And now you have taken Regina from me. If I'd only had her! She would have come to the rescue, I know.

MRS. ALVING

(*Goes to him*) What do you mean by that, my darling boy? Is there any help in the world that I wouldn't give you?

OSWALD

When I got over my attack in Paris, the doctor told me that when it came again . . . and it will come again . . . there would be no more hope.

MRS. ALVING

He was heartless enough. . . .

OSWALD

I demanded it of him. I told him I had preparations to make. (*He smiles cunningly*) And so I had. (*He takes a little box from his inner breast pocket and opens it*) Mother, do you see these?

MRS. ALVING

What is that?

OSWALD

Morphia powder.

MRS. ALVING

(*Looks horrified at him*) Oswald . . . my boy?

OSWALD

I have scraped together twelve pilules. . . .

MRS. ALVING

(*Snatches it*) Give me the box, Oswald.

OSWALD

(*Hides the box again in his pocket*) Not yet, mother.

MRS. ALVING

I shall never survive this.

OSWALD

It must be survived. Now, if I had Regina here, I should have told her how it stood with me and begged her to come to the rescue at the last. She would have done it. I'm certain she would.

MRS. ALVING

Never!

OSWALD

When the horror had come upon me and she saw me lying there helpless, like a new-born baby, impotent, lost, helpless, past saving . . .

MRS. ALVING

Never in all the world would Regina have done this.

OSWALD

Regina would have done it, Regina was so splendidly lighthearted. And she would soon have wearied of nursing an invalid like me . . .

MRS. ALVING

Then Heaven be praised that Regina is not here.

OSWALD

Well, then it is you that must come to the rescue, mother.

MRS. ALVING

(Screams aloud) I?

OSWALD

Who is nearer to it than you?

MRS. ALVING

I! Your mother!

OSWALD

For that very reason.

MRS. ALVING

I, who gave you life!

OSWALD

I never asked you for life. And what sort of a life is it that you have given me? I will not have it. You shall take it back again.

MRS. ALVING

Help! Help! (*She runs out into the hall*)

OSWALD

(*Goes after her*) Don't leave me. Where are you going?

MRS. ALVING

(*In the hall*) To fetch the doctor, Oswald. Let me go.

OSWALD

(*Locks the outer door*) You shall not go. And no one shall come in.

MRS. ALVING

(*Returns to the room*) Oswald . . . Oswald . . . my child!

OSWALD

(*Follows her*) Have you a mother's heart for me, and yet can see me suffer from this unutterable dread?

MRS. ALVING

(*After a moment's silence commands herself*) Here is my hand upon it.

OSWALD

Will you . . . ?

MRS. ALVING

If it is ever necessary. But it will never be necessary. No no, it is impossible.

OSWALD

Well, let us hope so, and let us live together as long as we can. Thank you, mother. *(He sits down in the armchair which Mrs. Alving has moved to the sofa. Day is breaking. The lamp is still burning on the table)*

MRS. ALVING

(Drawing near cautiously) Do you feel calm, now?

OSWALD

Yes.

MRS. ALVING

(Bending over him) It has been a dreadful fancy of yours. Oswald . . . nothing but a fancy. You have not been able to bear all this excitement. But now you shall have a long rest; at home with your own mother, my own blessed boy. Everything you point to you shall have, just as when you were a little child. There, now! That crisis is over now. You see how easily it passed. Oh! I was sure it would. . . . And do you see, Oswald, what a lovely day we are going to have? Brilliant sunshine! Now you will really be able to see your home. *(She goes to the table and puts the lamp out. Sunrise. The glacier and the snow peaks in the background glow in the morning light)*

OSWALD

(Sits in the chair with his back toward the window without moving) Mother, give me the sun.

MRS. ALVING

(Starts and looks at him) What do you say?

OSWALD

(Repeats in a dull, toneless voice) The sun . . . the sun.

MRS. ALVING

(Goes to him) Oswald, what is the matter with you? (*He seems to shrink together in the chair: all his muscles relax; his face is expressionless; his eyes have a glassy stare. Mrs. Alving is quivering with terror*) What is this? (*She screams*) Oswald, what is the matter with you? (*She falls on her knees and shakes him*) Oswald . . . Oswald . . . Look at me! . . . Don't you know me?

OSWALD

(*Mutters tonelessly*) The sun . . . the sun.

MRS. ALVING

(*Springs up in despair and cries out*) I can't bear it! (*Whispers as though petrified*) I can't bear it! Never! (*Suddenly remembers the poison*) Where has he got them? (*She fumbles hastily in his breast pocket*) Here! (*She shrinks back a few steps and screams*) No . . . no . . . no! Yes! . . . no, no! (*She stands a few steps from him with her hands twisted in her hair and stares at him in speechless terror*)

OSWALD

(*Sits motionless and says*) The sun . . . the sun!

The Wrong Way to Play the Scene

In the opening line, Oswald and his mother, by vocal pitch and inflection, reveal too soon the dramatic content of the situation instead of suggesting it. They give themselves no room to let the emotions expand. Mrs. Alving's protest at Oswald's confession of insanity brings a loud cry instead of a whisper of anguish. When she jumps up, she wrings her hands, cries, runs about, thereby dissipating the force of the moment. When Oswald mentions becoming a child again, he whines as a child, instead of speaking in a low, doomed voice. Mrs. Alving becomes maudlin as she assures her son she will give him anything. As Oswald takes out the poison and holds it up, he makes the gesture broad by holding the box at arm's length and gloating over it. As his insanity develops, he stalks about, raving reproaches at his mother, thereby producing an effect of comedy instead of tragedy.

If Oswald raises his voice and declaims when he asks for the sun, the line loses all its suggestion. When Mrs. Alving debates whether or not to give her son the poison, she runs about the room in a helpless manner, calling for help and weeping.

The Right Way to Play the Scene

As the scene opens, Mrs. Alving's mood is normal. She is sitting down with her son for a heart-to-heart talk. Her voice is soft and subdued, with just a hint of apprehension in it. Oswald's voice is quiet, but it has an underlying note of excitement. The whole attitude of his body reveals a sense of brooding. His mood is confessional, he wants to unburden himself; by sharing his secret he wishes to lose some of his own torment. There should be little or no physical movement until Oswald's confession of his inherited insanity. And even that gesture, as he points to his forehead, should not be broad or obvious.

All the horror Mrs. Alving feels is concentrated in her subdued, shocked whisper and her facial expression. Then, as her son enlarges on the subject, taking a morbid pleasure in unburdening himself, the mother's reaction becomes stronger. She jumps up; her voice rises in protest. It can't be! As he speaks wistfully of his desire to live, her mood turns to tenderness. She tells him gently that she will nurse him. The thought of being helpless sends Oswald to his feet, but the physical action brings him no release. He flings himself onto a chair again. All his body actions should convey the feeling of morbid brooding and despair. As he voices his fears, showing the first subtle signs of his growing insanity, his mother cries out again in alarm. Thinking of Regina, Oswald springs to his feet, paces the room. His motions should be those of a caged animal. They should have a hunted quality.

Mrs. Alving becomes gently solicitous; she asks her son if there is any help in the world she would deny him. In response Oswald draws from his pocket the poison, with a sly, cunning gesture (his movements are becoming more expressive of his mental condition). His mother, terrified, tries to snatch it away. Now, she begins to break under the strain. Her line, "I shall never survive

this," must be restrained and yet carry all the pain and pity of her maternal affection combined with her horror of the situation itself.

Oswald talks petulantly of Regina, how she might have saved him (by giving him the poison when his insanity returns). Mrs. Alving protests. Oswald's excitement mounts until the insanity takes a violent form. In terror, his mother goes for help. Oswald follows her, fearful of being left alone. He pleads with his mother to give him the poison if the insanity returns. She promises to stand by him, assuring him, however, that the occasion will never arise.

Oswald's behavior throughout the scene must be that of a person driven by a fear and dread of an affliction that is incurable and hopeless. Mrs. Alving's mood is cheerful and soothing as she turns out the lamp and tells her boy of the rising sun. But it is too late! For Oswald has sunk into complete insanity. Murder, love, horror, and pity clash within Mrs. Alving as she stands transfixed, debating whether or not to give Oswald the poison, to save him from a living death.

The Artistic Temperament

The novice who confuses temper with temperament has many followers. It is a play on words that is only too frequent in real life as well as on the stage.

Katharine Cornell put her finger on this confusion when she said: "All actors are supposed to have temperament, but real temperament is something infinitely more than eccentric behavior which enables one to become 'good copy.' A flair for publicity does not necessarily mean a flair for acting."

I remember an actress whose habit it was to respond to all my directions with "But I don't *feel* it that way!"

It was her artistic prerogative, I suppose she thought, to play the part as her own sensitive awareness of human nature dictated.

But that wasn't the real reason. The play was a farce, and the actress, a veteran of the stage, wasn't at home in farce. Her excuse, "I do not feel it that way," was made to cover her lack of knowledge of this difficult and unique kind of acting.

In other words, it was easier to throw a scene than to learn!

The real *artistic temperament* is the actor's individual peculiarity of physical and mental constitution that permits him to give something personal to a part.

His skill in handling the technical tools results in competent acting, but his way of looking at life adds that which is compelling and unique. It is the reach of his sympathy that sets the limits of each actor's strength.

It is like a river of intense feeling that flows out of him, vibrating with nervous force. Its source is the actor's own body and mind, and it is the deciding factor in what is termed "temperamental playing."

No new actor has any idea of the tremendous energy he can call on for artistic growth. Until he has gained a thorough understanding of the physical, mental, and emotional mechanics of acting and learned how the three are interrelated, he is never quite aware of this force. The effect is that of fierce emotion surging within him, trying to burst its bonds, fumbling for the right words, the right action to express his feeling. It involves a slow process of development that finally leads to the realization that the actor has within him the power to make other people feel the things he is thinking. Once he discovers its source, this flow can be increased or restrained at will.

Vitality in Acting

Vitality in acting depends on the extent of the actor's identification with the part he is playing, the intensity and sincerity of his own feeling, and his power to project emotional vibrations. For the audience will react in proportion to the intensity of the vibrations.

Every actor recognizes the necessity of this personal contribution to the emotions of his audience. A well-known Broadway player attended a matinee performance of Maurice Evans' production of "Henry IV." "I had a wonderful time," she said, with the enthusiasm of a schoolgirl fan. "I came away bursting with energy. Then I realized what the good actor does to his audience. . . . He gives off vitality!"

Consider the other side of the picture.

If the actor simply parrots his lines and follows a set of directions, he leaves his audience cold. He produces no feeling of vitality because his own emotions are not functioning. He is thinking, "On that line I cross left, sit down. The King enters. I jump up. Ho hum! After this act, I'll take a cool drink and relax."

On the other hand, if he is thinking, "I am an innkeeper. I weigh two hundred pounds. I am extremely indolent. I am looking forward with great pleasure to drinking a large tankard of ale. After bidding the last guest good night, I shuffle to the bench before the fire, pour out the ale, and collapse with a grunt on the bench. I take off my shoes, put my stocking feet (one bare toe exposed) upon the ledge. Just then the King enters. I hoist myself up. I make a clumsy bow, spilling the ale as I rise."

This actor has a clear conception of character. He is indolent (shuffling gait); self-indulgent (drinking ale); careless of appearance (hole in sock). He pours the ale with a gleam of hearty anticipation on his face. He falls (not sits) on his chair, and he resents the intrusion of the King, his superior, because he must rise.

At every step of the way, the audience feels with this character, because the actor himself is feeling the part.

This is vitality in acting.

Example: A player points the sharp end of a dagger in the direction of another player. The second actor regards this as a dangerous weapon, not a pasteboard prop. He reacts to it emotionally. The emotion is *fear*. Why? Because his mind tells him (through the memory of recall) that daggers are sharp, and he may be injured. Thus, when he dodges the blade, he rouses in the audience a sense of danger averted.

After a long run of a play, the actors come to believe in the reality of the props and the settings. The room in which they live each night from 8:30 to 11 is really a room and not a set. The clothes they wear are their own, not wardrobe-room property. And when they see props and setting as reality, they respond to them emotionally.

And so does the audience.

Body Grace

IN STAGE parlance, *body grace* means control of body movements and gestures.

The trained actor holds his body in restraint until he is sure just what he wants to do with it; then, with all the intelligence and grace at his command, he guides it.

He checks his arm movements until he is ready to make the gesture best suited to the part he is playing. He restrains his leg muscles until he receives his cue to move, with appropriate gestures, to a new position. He controls his facial expression (made from constant contraction of muscles under the skin of the face) until he has the right kind of mental stimulation to handle that contraction with telling force.

In every instance, the actor's mind is directing his body movements. Hence the term "body control."

There is a tendency in the new actor to follow the line of least resistance. If it seems more comfortable to curve the spine a bit to one side and to slouch the shoulders, he does those things instinctively, without regard to appearance.

Although his mental equipment may be adequate for the battle with stage training, his physical equipment, unless this tendency is curbed, will fall far short of even average possibilities. In other words, the would-be actor is starting his training with a very

grave handicap: lack of discipline or control over mind and body at the same time, whether they are at rest or in movement—a discipline that must reach perfection on the stage.

Alarming as this may sound (and to sound an alarm is my purpose), the outlook is not entirely discouraging. Most postural defects can be corrected easily if a conscious effort is made. Grace in body movement can be achieved.

The secret of good posture lies in a straight spine. If the backbone is held in proper vertical position, the shoulders and chest and hips automatically fall into line.

The best posture is that of a well-set-up soldier who assumes this position without the slightest effort. He is not conscious of muscle rigidity; on the other hand, he is aware of a sense of power and alertness that is at his immediate command when his stance is correct.

How to Check your Posture

Stand erect. Imagine that you are about to be hit from the rear. Automatically you straighten your body, bringing the abdomen up and in. Hold it! This movement raises the chest, stretching the distance from the waistline to the underarm (the midriff, calisthenic coaches call it). There . . . your posture is correct. Keep it that way.

And while you are perfectly poised, stretch and tense the stomach muscles. Continue this tensing upward and inward until you feel the pull in the middle of the back.

Standing at Ease

Now that your posture is correct, you needn't stand as unbending as Cleopatra's needle. Relax! Let the body suggest comfortable ease.

To accomplish this, lean against the wall, the feet about six inches from the baseboard. Roll up the spine, beginning with the

bottom vertebra, until the back is tight against the wall, all the way from the hips to the base of the skull. Now push away from the wall and stand erect. Pretend you are looking over a fence, just a little above eye level.

The slight lift of the chin sets the shoulders back and keeps the chest up.

Your posture is correct; your body is relaxed and at ease.

Grace in Arm Movements

Plenty of young actors regard their arms as boards nailed on at the shoulders, swinging loose to the finger tips. They are afraid to bend their arms lest they creak or even to allow natural gestures when they are so directed. I find this extreme attitude as common among the nonchalant boys and girls who are hanging on to their poise with grim determination by keeping their arms in stiff position as among the misguided youngsters who have been taught that being natural (that is, not bothering with body grace) is the real proof of art.

For his own part, the actor is ignoring the fact that the arm has three important hinges, the shoulder, the elbow, and the wrist, and that by proper manipulation of these hinges, he can use his arms to reveal moods and character.

For instance: the elbows nudge; they prop us up when we are tired; they stand out in sharp defiance; when they are brought in toward the body, they show timidity.

Shoulders shrug with indifference; they slump when we are tired or discouraged; they bend with old age; they shake with hearty laughter; they move with heavy sobs.

The wrist bends when we cup something, mix bread, or mold clay. It tenses when we close our fists.

The arm is divided into three areas of control:

1. Shoulder to elbow
2. Elbow to wrist
3. Hands

The area of the upper arm is strongest because the vital force or blood flows there first. Obviously, then, this section of the arm from the shoulder to the elbow is the most useful to the actor when his part calls for force. For example, when he moves another actor around the stage, he takes him by the upper arm, or he touches him at the elbow.

From the wrist to the elbow is the affectional area:

Example: In a caressive gesture, a mother holds her child with her forearms.

The hands, as I shall explain fully in Chapter 5, are the mental area.

How to Walk

Just as some actors are unaware that there are three hinges to the arm, so they are likely to forget that the leg has a similar number of hinges:

1. The hip
2. The knee
3. The ankle

The hip corresponds to the shoulder, the knee to the elbow, and the ankle to the wrist. As the actor points with his fingers, so he uses his toes (which, by the way, should always point outward).

The thigh area, from the hip to the knee (just as with the upper arm), is the strongest part of the leg. It is here that the greater part of the body weight should be carried. Don't put the entire load on your feet. Let the thigh and the hip muscles support their share of your weight. In walking, the thigh should be lifted forward; the calf and the foot swing from the knee. The unbending of the knee places the foot down as the weight simultaneously falls on it.

Walking, after all, is posture in motion. In walking we follow the same principles as in standing. We step out lightly, with the weight distributed between the ball of the feet and the heel. We don't walk heavily on our heels. And we do not tiptoe!

Remember these rules:

1. *Lead with your chin, not your stomach.*
2. *As you walk, move your hips and knees.*
3. *A slight swinging motion of the arms will give you the right balance.*

With ten minutes of walking around the room with a book or pillow on the head, twice daily, the walking posture may be kept under control. If, at the same time, you keep your mind on the position of chairs, tables, and sofas, you will grow accustomed to moving around stage furniture with ease and precision.

The Torso

To the average young actor, the part of the body called the torso is of little use in stage playing. He has the feeling that by remaining on his two feet and extending an arm, he can impress his audience with the fact that he is reaching out for something. When he wants to convey the idea that he is leaning, he simply inclines his head. In neither case is there visible movement of the body.

All these movements are wrong because they do not include proper use of the torso. As the head is inclined or the arm is extended, the whole body must move with the head or the arm, either forward or backward or sidewise, as the gesture may require.

Three Attitudes of the Torso

1. *Expansion (Leaning "to" an Object)*

a. A direct forward movement is objective. It is positive and shows purpose.

Example: We bend toward the table and select a book.

b. An oblique movement is subjective. An inner attitude moves us. Secrecy, craftiness, stealth are sidewise moves.

Example: We lean over the chair to read the letter of another.

2. Contraction (*Leaning "from" an Object*)

a. A direct backward movement on a straight line is objective.

Example: We back away from something repulsive.

b. An oblique movement is subjective. It signifies an inner impulse.

Example: We hide from something, crouching in the dark.

3. Relaxation (*Leaning "before" an Object*)

a. On a straight line expresses reverence, humility, resignation, grief.

Example: We bow before the inevitable.

b. Oblique or off the line expresses indifference, boredom, annoyance.

Example: We stand slumped, the head forward, the weight on one foot, listening to a boring and overlong speech.

When the body is erect and on a straight line it is positive; when it is off the line it is negative. A person who is always leaning against something shows not only lack of vitality but indifference.

Character and mood also can be shown in the torso by a twisting movement. A shy child, a coy young girl, or a sulky person twists the torso from side to side.

A love scene wouldn't be played by two characters standing bolt upright in a rigid manner, and neither would a general commanding his army stand on one foot, leaning against a wall.

How to Rise from a Chair

When we rise from a chair, our first impulse is to haul ourselves up by the chair arms. Don't do it! Seen from across the footlights, such a movement is almost grotesque. It suggests an outsized derrick in action.

Instead, let your thigh muscles lift your body. Let your spine push you from the chair.

Don't plant your two feet close together as you rise. If you do, you'll be thrown off your balance. Rather, sit with one foot resting on the floor slightly in front of the other. Thus, on rising, you will achieve perfect balance.

Instinctive Moves and Mechanical Moves

If you have a naturally graceful body or if you have undergone the right kind of training in body movement prior to embarking on a stage career, you may know how to walk and sit and stand and how and when to make a gesture. These moves are *instinctive moves*, performed with the freedom of ignorance, and, so far as they go, they are all right, but they cannot be depended upon.

There are times when a part calls for deliberate body action to get a certain stage effect, and the actor must be prepared to perform this action. The move then becomes *mechanical* and not *instinctive*. *It is performed with the freedom of knowledge.*

The mechanics of body movement consist of a series of transitional moves designed to give special interpretation to a character, to contribute rhythm and life to a scene, or to round out the general composition of the stage picture.

Example: Cross a room to a desk. Light a cigarette. Sit down on a chair.

Each movement or gesture must have a motive behind it. Economy of movement is one of the most difficult things for the new actor to learn. So bottled up is his energy that he has no sense of repose. He is inclined to run about the stage, with the result that he dissipates that force. He isn't aware that he can make an audience watch him by simply standing still. Acting doesn't necessarily mean action.

In order to show how to conserve muscular energy, relax the different parts of the body, and, at the same time, give them freedom, I have arranged a series of simple exercises.

EXERCISES

1. Stand with the feet just far enough apart to give balance. Extend the arms before you, shoulder height. Relax the muscles and let the arms drop limply to the sides.

2. Extend the arms to the side, shoulder height, and repeat the same exercise.

3. Repeat both the foregoing exercises, first with the left arm, then with the right.

4. Stand with the spine straight and roll the head around in a circle, with the neck muscles entirely relaxed. Do this movement first to the left, then to the right.

5. Stand with the feet far enough apart to give you balance. Extend both arms to the left, palms down, shoulder height. Relax the muscles and let the arms drop. As you do this, sway the body so as to carry the arms to the right shoulder height. Catch them there and hold the position. Hold for a second. Then relax the muscles and let the arms drop limply. Sway the body; swing the arms to the left. Catch the arms there and hold for a second. Repeat this exercise until you can relax and tense the muscles at will.

6. Stand with the feet far enough apart to give balance. Sway the body to the left in a circle from the waistline. To begin the move, sway forward and over left, back and over right, then front. This movement is continuously circular from the waistline. The arms and the neck are relaxed and follow along. The head rolls over with the movement. Repeat to the right.

7. Stand with the feet far enough apart to give balance. Keep the arms at the side relaxed. Sway the body to the left and throw the arms to the left and over the head. Describe a circle with them. The body will give enough momentum to carry the arms around. Repeat the exercise to the right.

8. Repeat the above exercise to the left. As you get into motion, bend forward and back from the waistline with a circular movement. Throw the arms down toward the floor. Carry the arms as near the floor as possible on the downward sweep. As they come

up over the head, the body is bent back from the waistline. You are describing a complete circle with the arms. Let the eyes follow the hands. Repeat the exercise to the right.

9. Select a book about two inches thick. Step on it with the right foot. Relax the muscles of the left leg and allow it to swing limp. Repeat with the right leg. If at first you cannot keep your balance, hold onto a chair.

10. Stand with both feet together, spine straight. Keep the feet on the floor. Lean forward as far as possible, using the ankle as a hinge. Then lean back as far as you can. Now describe an entire circle with the body.

11. Stand with the feet slightly apart, the arms limp at your sides. Turn the head to the left as far as you can. Let the body sway slightly by rolling over the left foot and picking up the right heel. Turn the head to the right as far as you can. Let your body follow and help you around. Roll over the right foot and lift the left heel. Make this one continuous movement from the left to the right. To begin each move, throw the arms first to the left and then to the right.

Synchronizing Speech with Action

Sooner or later, the young actor will be called upon to play a scene in which he must dance or walk or play tennis or go through some other elaborate physical movement, and, *at the same time*, speak important dialogue.

It sounds easy enough, doesn't it? But wait until you try it for the first time.

You have learned by this time that your movements on the stage are in perfect accord with your thoughts. When you say, "There it is on the table . . ." you walk to the table, and pick up the book or brief case or vase of flowers that you are talking about.

Your speech and action are directed toward the same object.

But consider what happens in a scene in which you are dancing (which means that you must think of the intricate dance routine and guide your body and feet in the proper direction) and at the

same time speaking dialogue to your partner on any subject from cabbages to kings! *Now your brain is doing double duty; you are thinking and speaking of one thing and thinking and doing another!*

The old "How well we dance together, darling" kind of stage talk is gone. No more does the leading man sing the words of "Tales from the Vienna Woods" as he waltzes with the star (thereby keeping his steps in time and filling in an awkward gap in dialogue).

Instead, the actor and actress dance and at the same time carry on talk that furthers the audience's understanding of the plot of the play—real dialogue, with a meaning, which has to be put over logically and audibly and sometimes with appropriate body movement, aside from dancing.

In the scene at Frau Sacher's in "Reunion in Vienna," Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne danced a waltz *and talked together* as part of the most important action of the play. So revealing were their gestures and what they had to say to each other that gradually the other actors on the stage nodded, smiled, bowed deeply and departed, leaving the two lovers talking and dancing together: A bit of action dialogue for the student to consider.

The most perfect example of muscular coordination is a young couple dancing together. Their bodies sway in rhythm to the beat of the music. They change from waltz tempo to tango with effortless ease. They have perfect control of their bodies and the shifting movement of their feet.

I say, then, before you can hope to dance and speak dialogue at the same time, you must learn to dance. *You must have complete body control.*

So sure will be your dance technique that it will not be necessary for your brain to telegraph dance movement messages to your body; the body will follow through without orders. All the brain energy you possess can be directed to the spot where it is most needed: to the delivery of your lines as you move through the body motions of the dance.

This same kind of body control is necessary in any sort of movement made during a speech, be it leading a parade of soldiers

or pouring tea before a fireside in an English drawing room. *Control your body* and your speech will follow as a logical part of the complete scene.

Many of the dancers who worked for me in the early days have found success in dramatic roles on the stage and in motion pictures. Joan Crawford, Nancy Carroll, Barbara Stanwyck—all danced in the chorus of Shubert shows. In those days, their minds were kept strictly on their dance steps. They were perfect dancing machines, so sure of their routines that their bodies moved automatically.

What they were doing, actually, was paving the way for the time when this body control would leave their minds free for the other side of acting—for lines and character interpretation.

One ballet girl seemed to sense this connection between body grace and dramatic acting. In a Winter Garden revue, a very intense, serious-faced young dancer used to beg me for understudy roles. I had to refuse her because of the handicap of her strong Russian accent. This handicap was later to prove a blessing. In a few years, this same ballet girl, Eugenie Leontovich, stepped into fame as the star of "Grand Hotel."

Her magnificent performance of the tragic, weary dancer, Grusinskaia, in that famous play would never have been so true had Leontovich not gone through many years of actual ballet training, which is the highest form of body control. Not only was she able to do the necessary toe dancing but she brought to the part a solid knowledge of a dancer's hopes and problems, her background and struggles, and the tragedy of failure.

Since she had superb body control, Leontovich had only to go ahead with her work on lines to make the most of her part.

Stage Poise

Off stage, when a lady enters a drawing room, she pauses at the door, locates with her eye the chair or group of people or piano toward which she is going, and then follows the line of her eye.

On stage, the actress follows very much the same program. On entering the scene, she does not look down at the footlights,

stare at the audience, or cast her eyes on the floor. Poised and ready for her lines, she moves toward the piece of furniture assigned to her or to the person or group with whom she is to speak. We shall assume that by the time the opening night has arrived she is so familiar with every piece of stage furniture that, if she must be seated, she will not look at the chair as though she had never seen it.

But before she can hope to achieve this happy combination of poise and delivery (no matter what her background off stage may be) the new actress may have to go through a course of training in stage movements either at home or in rehearsals. She will give her director a pleasant surprise if she equips herself with a knowledge of these movements before he asks her to face the footlights.

These exercises, followed in order, will do a lot to start her on her way to an easy, self-assured stage presence.

EXERCISES

1. With the spine straight, the chin up, walk to a chair. Sit; don't slump. After a short pause, get up. Step on the left foot and walk to the left. If you are moving to the left, as you rise, step on the left foot to begin the move. If you are moving to the right, use the right foot. In this way you can rise and walk in one graceful, sweeping move.

2. Place a chair center stage. Enter from stage left, and walk quickly to the chair. Kneel on the left knee at the left of the chair. Repeat this movement from the right of the stage. This exercise will develop balance and poise.

3. Now make the same entrance from stage left, slowly this time. Drop slowly onto the left knee, bow the head slowly forward as if you were asking for forgiveness. Repeat this same move from the right of the stage. This movement can be used in a "swash-buckling" or costume part.

4. Walk toward a vase. Pick out a flower. Hold it up before you and admire it. Show its beauty to your friends and then replace the flower.



EXERCISE 5. Revulsion. (*Illustrations for Exercises 5, 6, 7, and 8 were posed by Patricia Bowman, America's foremost dancer of ballet. Photographs by Richardson, St. Louis.*)

5. Sway the body to the right with the hands to the left, about shoulder height, palms away from you. This movement expresses horror, dislike, revulsion. The movement of the hands and the body should be made in unison.



EXERCISE 6. Dejection.

6. Stand with the spine straight. Let the body slump. Begin the move by slowly bowing the head. The rest of the body follows until the right knee bends a little and the weight is on the left leg. Clasp your hands loosely. Perform the whole movement in unison. This posture expresses despondency, hopelessness, tragedy, or defeat.



EXERCISE 7. Recovery.

7. From this tragic mood, listen as your name is called. Look up and see some friend who inspires you with hope. The body straightens, the chin comes up, and a smile breaks over the face.



EXERCISE 8. Stooping.

8. Imagine you are picking up a basket of flowers from the floor with both hands (Exercise 8) and offering it (Exercise 9) to someone who stands on a balcony. Keep the palms up when you extend the hands. Do this in one continuous flowing movement.



EXERCISE 9. Offering.

In practicing Exercises 8 and 9 let the torso, shoulders, and head help the action.

Movements and Gestures to Suggest Character

It happens to the best of us, so don't say it hasn't happened to you—that moment when some prejudiced friend or relative compares your walk or arm movements or lift of the eyebrows to the superlative movements of a stage celebrity.

Such as, "Dear, your walk is amazingly like Fontanne's." Or, "Has anyone ever told you that your hand movements are like Helen Hayes?" Or, "When you lift your eyebrows, you certainly out-Lillie Lady Peel!"

Well meant, no doubt, but deadly. For the pleasant glow that accompanies your protest that it can't be true is probably fanned into white-hot fire as you make up your mind to carry out the mutual gesture or know the reason why.

You'll walk in quick, nervous steps, or you'll wave your hands shyly, or you'll elevate your eyebrows until they are lost in your bangs. And somehow, in the process of using their gestures, you'll manage to absorb the other important qualities of the original models.

And there is where the trouble starts. For the gesture or movement that you copy doesn't belong to you.

On the mirror of every theatrical aspirant should be pasted this warning:

Never use a gesture because you have seen someone else use it and you like it. Ask yourself whether the gesture or movement fits the character you are playing.

Every bit of body movement has a meaning of its own. It can reveal age, character, mood, education, and background of the character you are interpreting. Instead of nourishing your ego by using some movement that appeals to you, personally, as being becoming to you (mainly because it is becoming to some other actor), suppose, then, you consider the wisdom of letting each gesture you make contribute to your interpretation of the character you are playing.

Youthful Movements

Theatrical folk, as well as playgoers, are still talking about Katharine Hepburn's control of her body movements in her interpretation of the young Amazon in "The Warrior's Husband." In one scene, Miss Hepburn made an entrance by hurling herself headlong down a flight of stairs. Clad in armor, with a dead deer slung over her shoulders, she was youth incarnate, a perfect picture of vigorous, lithe, healthy, forceful young womanhood.

So realistic was Miss Hepburn's plunge down the stairs, that veterans of the stage stood in the wings nightly and shook their heads: "That girl will break her neck someday!"

But she didn't. Her balance (body control) was perfect. Not once was she in danger of a fall.

Youthful body movements in acting reveal these qualities:

1. Spontaneity
2. Vitality
3. Enthusiasm
4. Nonreflection (The young person acts before he thinks; old age reflects.)

Youth sits poised on the arm of a chair until the next thought (or stage line) carries him elsewhere. He flings himself down on a sofa, stretches his long legs, or drapes one leg over the arm. He is ever ready for a new movement!

Old-age Movements

The slumping posture of old age suggests collapse of the muscles. As we grow older, the spine shrinks. The old person sinks or falls into a chair with a grunt or groan. He settles into the cushions; he is glad to be there.

Some of you will remember the veteran actor, John Drew, in the revival of "Trelawney of the Wells," his last stage appearance.

Playing the part of a very old man, Mr. Drew fingered his shoulder shawl, hobbled about, and called, testily: "*Have we no chairs?*" And, once a chair was provided, he sank into it, bones

creaking, with a gesture of relief. Every gesture called for rest of the weary body.

Old-age body movements reveal these qualities:

1. Slowness
2. Weakness
3. Caution
4. Reflection

In the last scene of "Victoria Regina," Helen Hayes, as the aged queen, watched her Diamond Jubilee procession from a wheel chair. Her limp little figure tried vainly to assume a regal pose. Her hands clutched the arms of the chair, her head lifted with interest as the crowd went by, and dropped with weariness when no one was near. Her gestures as she caressed the heads of the royal grandchildren, her sharp taps with her stick—all these were perfect body movements of old age.

And done with consummate artistry by an actress young enough to be Victoria's great-great-grandchild!

Stage Falls

There are three different kinds of stage fall, and each can be dangerous if not done scientifically. They are:

1. *Fall for a faint—result of shock*
2. *A wound fall—result of a blow, bullet, or knife wound*
3. *A death fall—natural withdrawal of life*

In order to make a fall convincing, the muscles are left lax and uncontrolled; the body seems to collapse. A *relaxed stage fall* is not dangerous. It is only when the actor keeps his muscles tensed that he is in danger of broken bones or concussions.

I have never known a more versatile actress than Marie Dressler. She could jump from drama to comedy and back again without batting an eyelash. At the mention of a new piece of comedy business, she was as delighted as a child with a toy.

I had occasion to rehearse her in a burlesque sketch in a Winter Garden revue in which she played a queen. To get a laugh at the opening of the scene, I invented a trick throne for Miss Dressler to

use for comedy purposes. Since she hadn't seen the throne, I stopped her at dress rehearsal to explain the trick to her. The throne was upheld by two pieces of wood the thickness of a match. When Miss Dressler sat down on it, she would fall through. She listened attentively and examined the throne. Then she asked me to go out front to see her entrance in costume. We agreed that she would not use the throne until she had had more rehearsal.

Beautifully gowned, and wearing a jeweled crown, Marie Dressler made a regal entrance. With proper ceremony, she walked to the throne, sat down hard on the seat, and went through with a crash! The jeweled crown flew one way and the Dressler feet another. With a sick feeling in my heart, I jumped up on the stage. A crowd of boys and girls were helping Miss Dressler to her feet. To my anxious inquiry as to her injuries, she replied, "Don't be silly! I'm not hurt. We aren't going to rehearse this again."

Marie Dressler was a real trouper, who knew all the tricks. But if she hadn't understood the technique of falling, she might have been seriously injured.

EXERCISES

1. *Forward Fall*

Place a pillow in front of you and face it. Now bend your knees as though you were going to kneel. Bring your knees as close to the pillow as you can without dropping on them. Do this until you feel control. Now relax the leg muscles and drop onto the pillow with your knees. This is the first step in learning a forward fall. To complete it, the torso falls forward, and the right arm is raised in the fall to protect the head, which falls on it. At first, break the fall with the hands, and, when you are thoroughly familiar with the technique, use the single arm. This fall should be practiced carefully in each stage until you are absolutely sure of your ability to perform it in a relaxed manner.

After you have mastered this fall from a standing position, you must learn to walk into it. To make the fall appear natural is a difficult task. A faint, for instance, might begin from a standing

position. But if you were shot, you would collapse, struggle a few steps, and then fall to the ground. In other words, you would not fall immediately on the same spot on which you were standing when shot. Walk five or six steps or more, as the case may be. Now place enough pillows to break the fall and walk slowly into the fall. After a while you will be able to make a perfect fall without injury. In order to make the perfect fall, every muscle must be relaxed; the head must be protected by the arm.

2. *Fall to the Right*

Face front and place a pillow on the right side. You are not facing the pillow. Now bend the knees and incline them to the right. Aim for the pillow. Let your ankles roll the feet over. You will be on the outside edge of the right foot and the inside edge of the left. Clear this up before you proceed any further.

This fall gives the impression that you are falling on the right side. This is true, to a certain extent, but you are breaking the fall with the knees. The torso falls over on the right side with the right arm extended to protect the head. A fall of this kind is most difficult to execute. If made while in motion, with the body beginning to collapse before the actual fall, it is very effective.

3. *Fall to the Left*

A fall to the left is done exactly as the fall to the right except that the position is reversed. Place the pillow on the left side. Incline the knees to the left and drop onto the pillow. Let the ankles roll the feet over. You will be on the outside edge of the left foot and the inside edge of the right. The left arm will come up to protect the head as you fall.

Personality Development through Body Control

I would rather direct an actress who is not blessed with a beautiful face (because good looks on the stage can be managed through the proper use of make-up and costuming) but who knows how to walk, how to use her hands, how to hold her head proudly

than the actress with the perfectly molded features. Beauty, unaccompanied by body control, is often lost behind the footlights.

Body control is really an expression of individuality. If an actress is awkward and fumbling in her movements, it may be a sign that she hasn't yet realized her own potentialities. The actress with the self-assured, graceful bearing is nine times out of ten the one who has some inner realization of what she wants to be.

When you see a mannequin in a shop, you know that when she goes behind the curtain, her body movements will remain under control. "That time I walked well," will be her conscious thought. The fact that she is conscious of her body movements is revealed through every gesture she makes. If your reaction to her is, "What grace and muscular control she has!" you may be sure that she is always graceful, that her body is a channel for a poised personality.

Beatrice Lillie is my idea of an extremely graceful woman. She is so much at ease with herself that she is able, almost by lifting a hand, to portray the stupidities and peculiarities of other women who have no fundamental individuality.

The power Miss Lillie has over her audience comes not from her good looks but from the radiation of a fully developed personality. There may be a bevy of beauties on the stage, but when Beatrice Lillie makes her nimble, self-assured entrance, she walks away with the audience.

The Language of the Hands

WHEN Tallulah Bankhead, as a pompadoured belle of 1900, went into rehearsals of her latest play, her first cry was, "What shall I do with my hands?"

For Miss Bankhead, in a series of modern parts, had grown so accustomed to tapping a cigarette with her long-nailed, vividly painted fingers that, when faced with a character of a day when no nice woman smoked or lacquered her nails, the star was nonplused.

Finally the director provided a glass of sherry (for holding purposes) in one scene and a small fan in another, and rehearsals of the play went on apace.

The question, "What shall I do with my hands?" is a common one on any stage. In everyday life, we seldom give our hands a thought, but as soon as we face the footlights we become painfully conscious of them. They stiffen and clinch. They hang as dead weights at our sides. Or they flutter aimlessly in the air as we punctuate our speech with nervous, unfocused movements.

I remember a young man who played a police officer in a production that I rehearsed many years ago. He, too, didn't know what to do with his hands. He tried swinging the policeman's club, but that didn't help; he was still painfully conscious of his two large fists. Finally I told him to find the seams of his trousers and hold on for dear life.

Clutching the seams with both hands, the actor went through his part with less and less awkwardness. Finally, he forgot about his hands. Today this actor—John Charles Thomas—is one of the best poised men on the concert and grand opera stage.

If an actor isn't in uniform, he may place one hand in his pocket and the other at his lapel. You've all seen actors who keep their stage poise by hooking their thumbs in their two front vest pockets.

Frequently a small prop is used to cover an actor's temporary embarrassment. A cigar, a piece of knitting, a cup of tea, a book deftly used will so occupy the hands that there will be no evidence in the man or woman's behavior that for a moment at least his hands have been useless, awkward appendages.

Many a famous actor has been identified by the prop he uses. Will Rogers' rope is one; Charlie Chaplin's cane, W. C. Fields' cigar are other well-known embarrassment relievers. If we traced the origin of the prop, we might find that it was first selected in desperation to cover the actor's beginning confusion.

In a period production, an actor can handle a sword or toss a long cape, lift his lace cuffs or doff a beplumed hat when he suffers hand consciousness.

One of the most effective hand props ever used in a costume play was the famous cat of Cardinal Richelieu in the Ziegfeld production, "The Three Musketeers."

In the second act of the play, Richelieu (Reginald Owen) conversed with Lady de Winter (Vivienne Osborne) and D'Artagnan (Dennis King). On the knee of the wily cardinal rested a handsome white cat (bought at a pet show for three hundred dollars by Mr. Ziegfeld himself. "You can't fool an audience," was his apology for the price. "They'd know a cardinal would have a good cat").

As Richelieu's suave voice carried a message of persuasion to D'Artagnan, the audience was fascinated by the sight of the cardinal's hand keeping time with his voice by stroking the cat. When the moment came to ask Lady de Winter to take over the task of persuading D'Artagnan to the cardinal's way of thinking,

Reginald Owen literally let the words come out of his hands, without speaking a syllable. With a graceful curve of his wrist, he finished stroking the animal and carried the gesture toward Lady de Winter in an order that was unmistakable in its significance.

Although this combination of hand prop and hand gesture belongs in the actor's bag of tricks, it is the precise and knowing use of the hands alone that the young actor must learn. The hands have a language all their own. The sooner the newcomer to the stage teaches his hands to speak that language the easier will it be for him to make the most of his opportunities.

Hands soft and curving extend the blessing of the church. Hands harsh and angular form the military salute. Hands clenched express power or fear. Caressing hands are kind and tender. *Hands need not be beautiful to be effective; some of the most beautiful hands in the world aren't even well shaped. But they are expressive; they have a story to tell.*

An unusually fine piece of pantomime, expressed almost entirely by the hands, was done by Helen Morgan as Julie in the original production of "Show Boat." In directing later companies of the play I was never able to get another actress to duplicate the move with the same precision.

In the scene, Magnolia (Norma Terris) had come to a night club for a job. Julie, her old friend and star of the club, had just been warned by the manager that if she didn't stop drinking, he would let her go. Julie made an exit. Meanwhile Magnolia had arrived and seated herself near the piano. She began to sing an old Southern song taught to her by Julie. Attracted by the song, Julie reentered, unseen by Magnolia, whose back was turned to her. Julie, delighted, put out her hands as though to embrace Magnolia. Then, as she realized that Magnolia was badly dressed and obviously in need of the job, she backed away, drawing her hands inward. With one hand she groped for her hat and bag on the top of the piano. Her other hand reached out once more, tenderly. Then slowly she drew it to her mouth as though to stifle the words. Hastily, Julie backed away.

In this scene, without any spoken word, Helen Morgan conveyed joy, the hopelessness of her own condition, and the fact that she was sacrificing her job. Later in the play she sent word to the manager that she had gone on a drunken tear in order that Magnolia might have her job.

Acting with the Hands

Stand before a mirror that reflects every hand movement and watch the *effects* produced by extension and contraction of your hands.

The hand is divided into three areas:

1. The palm (the emotive area)
2. The fingers (the mental area)
3. The thumb (the vital area)

The index finger, which shows force and judgment, falls naturally into the realms of masculine usage. This is the finger with which the stern parent, the judge, the schoolmaster *points* at the errant child.

The little finger, on the other hand, belongs to the feminine world. When it is crooked, it expresses cunning, subtlety, delicacy, and mock refinement. When a male player interprets an overbred and elegant character (such as Beau Brummell) he crooks his finger in order to suggest the very qualities that might ordinarily be found in a woman.

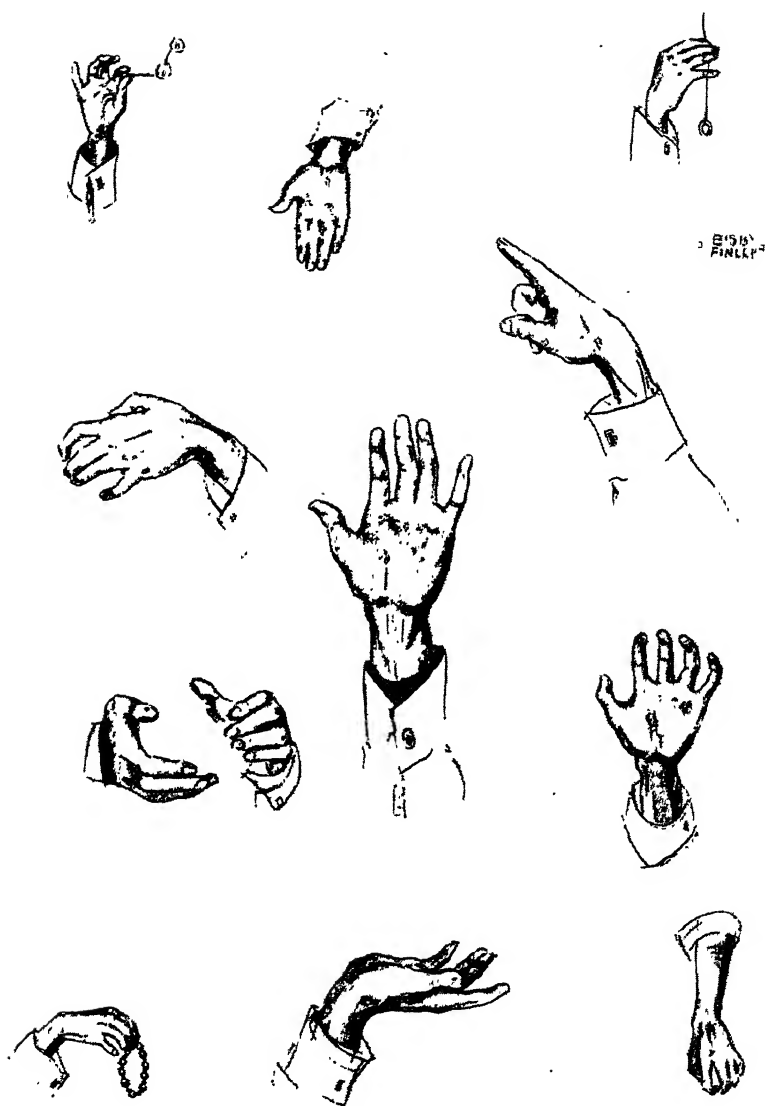
The two middle fingers are the implements of affection. When we stroke or caress an object, these fingers are called into use.

The thumb is vital and indicates the will. When it is active, the will is strong; when it is limp and inactive, the will is weak. With the pressure of the thumb, we confirm the sincerity of a handshake. "Thumbs down"—from the days of the Romans—has had a meaning of its own: disapproval.

Hands may:

Accept (the palm upturned, the fingers open)

Reject (the palms down)



Attitudes of the hands.

- Support (the palm up, the hand flat)
- Caress (the palms curved to touch the object)
- Surrender (the palms up, the fingers open)
- Inquire (the fingers outstretched)
- Detect (feel textures between the thumb and the fingers)
- Deny (the palms down)
- Indicate (the side of the hand)
- Define (the hands move up and down with the sides toward the floor)
- Mold (the hands cupped)
- Conceal (the hands brought in, the fingers closed)
- Reveal (the hands extended, the fingers open)
- Ignore (the back of the hand toward object)
- Grasp (the palms down, the fingers closed)

A *closed hand* shows tightening emotions: fear, secrecy, caution, hardness, selfishness, stubbornness, resistance, determination.

A *half-open hand* shows relaxation, carelessness, gentleness, kindness, ease.

An *open hand* suggests expansion of thought; it may indicate power, benevolence, leadership, surprise, welcome (greeting).

The hand is the agent of the mind; we grope in the dark; we feel whether a texture is rough or smooth. The touch of a hot plate blisters our fingers. A sharp cut from a glass warns us to drop it.

By using his hands and fingers in gesture, the actor indicates his relationship to his background (the chair, the table, the sofa); his objective (where he is going); and the other characters (who is who).

The degree of feeling expressed in a hand alters its form.

Hands are usually our first point of contact. A limp handshake is a silent condemnation of the owner.

The actress who wants her hands to create a mood, background, character, or a racial illusion will unobtrusively pose her hands when she is talking or listening in a scene so that they clearly serve her purpose.

When you use your hands, lead with the wrist. Whether pointing upward or downward, make your wrist carry your hands. When your wrist is stiff, your hands seem heavy and ugly.

Race

Hands tell more about racial characteristics than any other part of the human body. The actor is quick to catch this method of depicting faultlessly the instincts and peculiarities of his part.

A native of China carries his hands in front of him, semiclasped about chest height. This is because the Chinese wear the wide mandarin sleeves. Since he is a slow, deep thinker, a Chinaman's gesture is never broad.

The Italian brings his elbows in toward the body, hands in front with palms up and fingers curled and spread. As he gestures the wrists are kept flexible.

The Frenchman uses the shoulder more freely than the Italian. His hand gestures are not quite so broad.

Fast-speaking Latin races gesture more broadly and frequently than such slow-speaking races as Swedes, Scotch, and English.

Mood

As our moods change, so do the movements of our hands. Fidgety hands, for instance, betray nervousness and lack of poise. "Handkerchief actress," I call the woman who twists and unrolls her kerchief until at the end of the scene the bit of linen is a limp rag.

When our nerves are out of control, we use our hands to rub the ear, massage the chin, scratch the head, pull at the collar. We stroke the cheek and run fingers through the hair. We interlace our hands; we rub the palms together; we massage the wrists. Some of us crack knuckles. There's a drumming on a convenient table by the unpoised actor. Two hands are held together, church and steeple fashion, finger tips meeting, by the nervously uncontrolled.

When we are tired, we pass our hands across our brows. We try to hide a yawn. We prop up our heads. We cover our faces with our two hands and massage our closed eyelids.

A person in despair wrings his hands, clenches his fists, clasps his hands tightly.

A mother with her child uses gentle, caressive gestures, soft and curving.

A happy person claps his hands.

In one of her most successful roles in recent years, Katharine Cornell, alone on the stage, acts a three-minute drama with her hands. She is the wife in a triangle situation. Her husband has left with the other woman. As the door closes on him, she lifts her hands in helpless questioning of fate. Next she clenches her fists in agony. Later, she slowly taps her fingers on her hand (thought); lifts and clasps them together to show that she has found an idea. She repeats the tapping finger (thought) as she develops the idea. Lastly, she rubs her hands together with deep and intense satisfaction. The situation is saved.

All this was straight acting with the hands—and not one word was spoken. Is it any wonder that the audience burst into noisy applause?

Background

Not long ago a foreign actress portrayed the part of a slavey. She used a scrubbing brush with the skill of familiarity. In her hands the brush was not a prop but something that was used for a purpose. When the actress wiped her wet hands on her apron, she made a convincing gesture. She *was* a slavey; and her hands confirmed this.

A laborer's hands are usually broad, calloused, with nails broken and dirty. A washwoman's hands are red, wrinkled, and often blistered.

People who work with their hands are always deft and accurate in their movements. Surgeons, musicians, prize fighters, hair-

dressers, typists—all make their hands move in harmony with the thoughts that direct them.

Character

Actors who create a wide variety of characters for diversified plays must speak with their hands.

A hick character snaps his suspenders. A sheriff character or comedy detective hooks his thumbs in his vest. A prize fighter carries a small rubber ball to strengthen the muscles in his hand. A greedy character such as Uriah Heep wrings his hands in an unctuous gesture.

A prim old maid keeps her hands tightly clasped.

Zazu Pitts became famous because of her fluttering gestures of helplessness.

Duse's hands, which were perhaps the most famous in theatrical history, were once described as "never still and yet not restless, with the power of transmitting a physical quality even to her clothes."

Too many actresses forget to age their hands in playing. In "Bitter Sweet," Norma Terris was called upon to play a young girl in the beginning and a woman of seventy in the end. She used her hands perfectly. As the young girl, Miss Terris let her hands flop from the wrists in a giddy, youthful manner. This gesture brought a laugh from the audience.

Helen Hayes made her first entrance in "Victoria Regina" as the eighteen-year-old queen, holding her hands to her shawl, hastily thrown over her nightgown. And in the end, as the aged queen, she allowed her hands to clasp the arms of the wheel chair.



FIG. 1. (Photographs by Richardson, St. Louis.)

EXERCISES FOR TRAINING THE HANDS

A. Let the hands hang loosely from the wrists, the knuckles up and the fingers open. Now shake or dangle them up and down on the hinge of the wrist as if they were rubber. The movement is similar to one you would use in shaking out a tablecloth. This exercise is for flexibility and relaxation (Fig. 1).



FIG. 2.

B. Raise the arms slowly in front to shoulder height. Let the wrists lead, the hands hung limp with the fingers pointing to the floor, as in Fig. 2. Near the completion of the upward move bring the hands up so that the palms face away from you and the finger tips are upraised as in Fig. 3.



FIG. 3.

C. The wrists begin the movement down, the palms are still away from you, the finger tips upraised, as in Fig. 3. At the end of the movement, the hands relax and resume the limp position from which they started, as in Fig. 2. This should be an easy, flowing movement, not jerky.

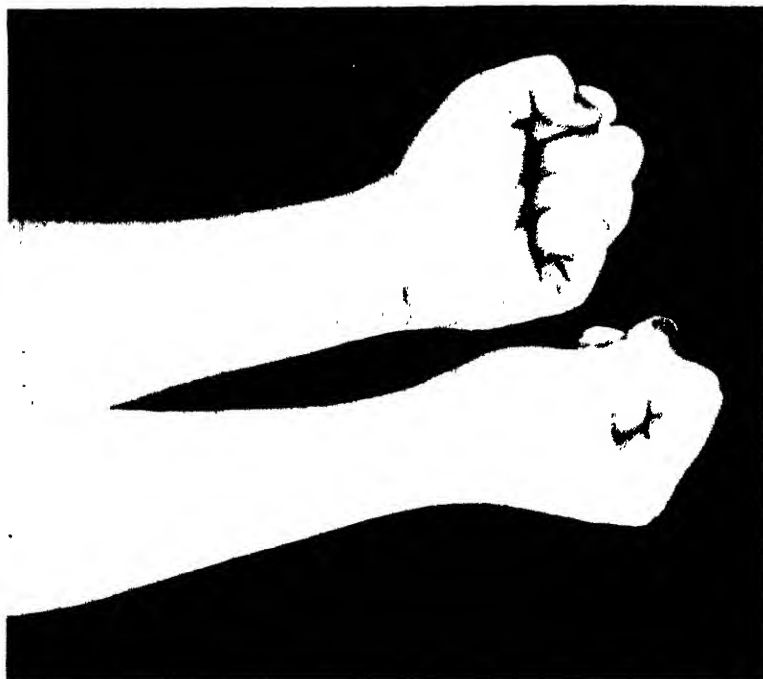


FIG. 4.

The exercise illustrated in Figs. 4 and 5 is the simple groundwork for all the gestures that follow.

Diligent practice not only will give control but will make the hands and fingers flexible.

D. Close the hands in front of you, the palms up, as in Fig. 4. Now open them slowly. Keep the fingers close together. Open

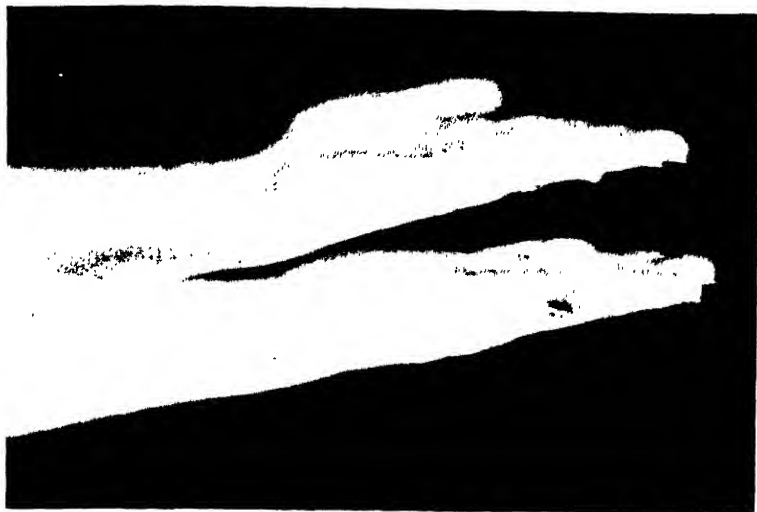


FIG. 5.

Some people are unable to straighten their fingers to full length. By continuous practice this exercise will enable the student to gain such muscular control that he may use each finger separately and independently if he so wishes.

and close them. Make the fingers flatten out straight to their full length when you open the hands, as in Fig. 5.

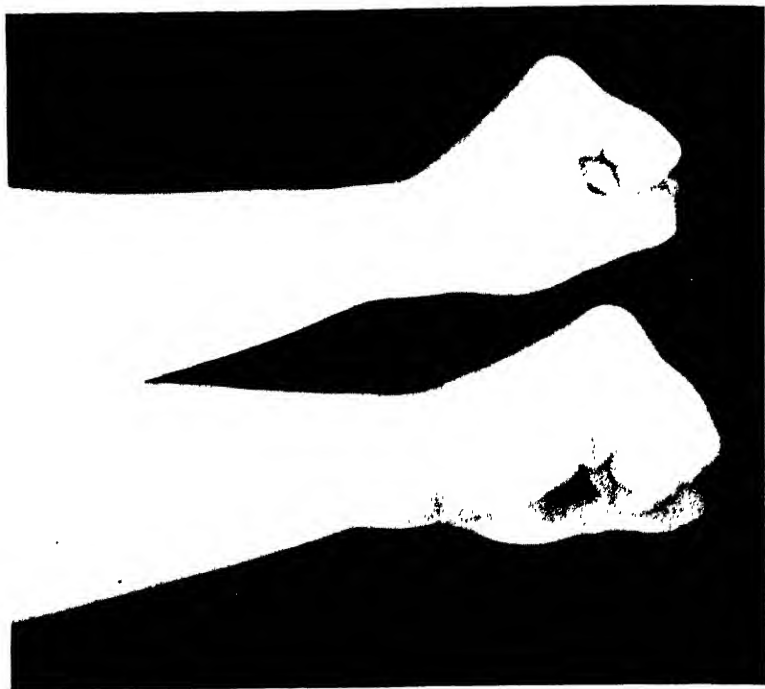


FIG. 6.

Figures 6, 7, and 8 illustrate the beginning, middle, and finish of the gesture described in Exercise E. At all times practice these moves slowly. The effect should be that of a smooth unfolding of the fingers. It should never be jerky.

E. Begin with the hands closed, the knuckles up, as in Fig. 6. Turn the hands over. They should begin to open as you start to turn the wrist, as in Fig. 7, and finish opening as the move is completed. Straighten the fingers full length and keep them close together.

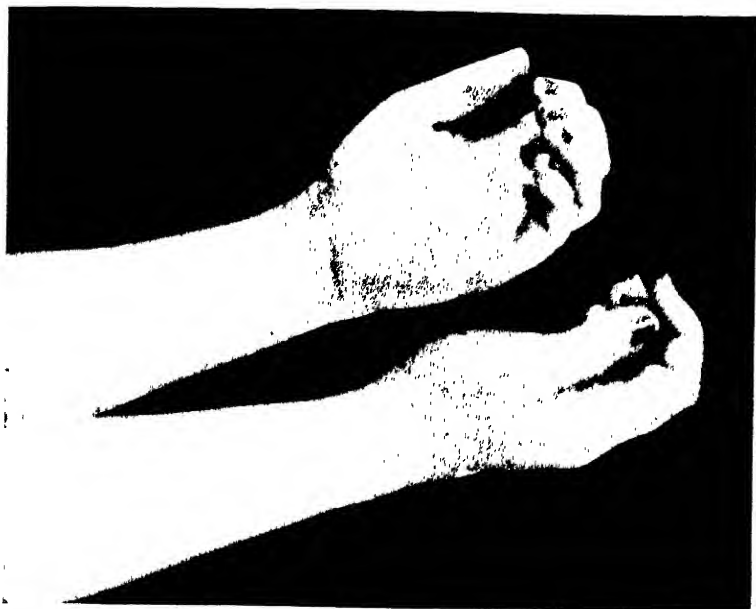


FIG. 7.

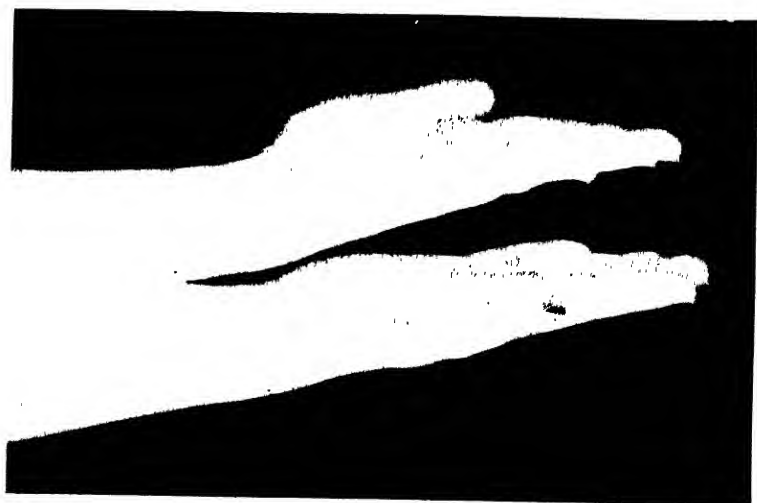


FIG. 8.

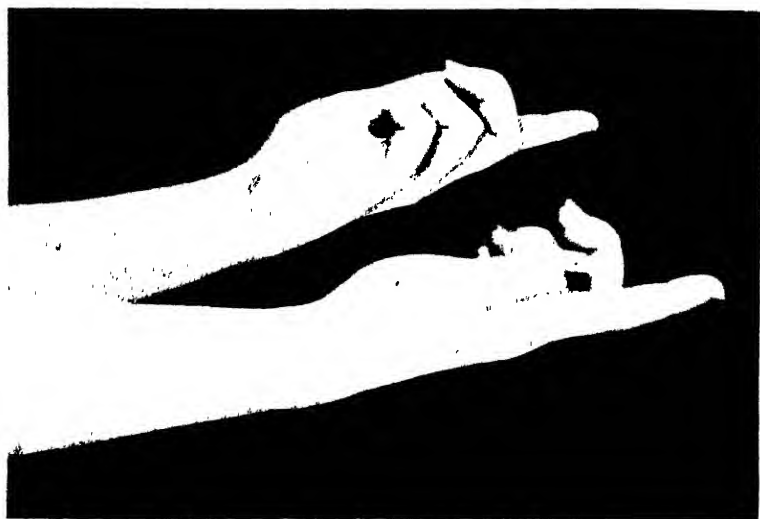


FIG. 9.

The student may modify this gesture, but must always remember to keep the forefinger straight. Always try to avoid the effect of stiffness or rigidity in forming a gesture.

F. Begin with the hands closed, the palms down. Turn the hands over and, as you do, open them, as in Exercise E. Instead of flattening out the fingers, as in Fig. 8, finish with the forefinger straight out, as in Fig. 9. The other three fingers are crooked up, the little finger a little more than the other two.

Before going on with the next exercise, practice these five until you are proficient.

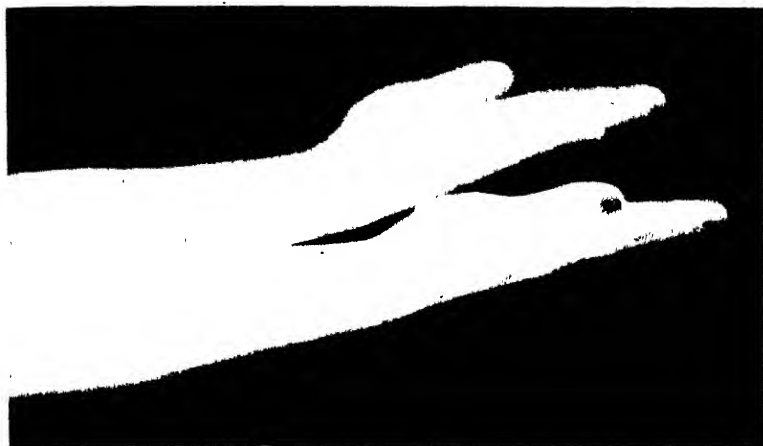


FIG. 10.

Figure 10 shows the completion of the gesture described in Exercise E.

Let this gesture begin with the shoulders and flow smoothly to the finger tips.

G. Drop the arms naturally in front of you at ease. Pick them up and extend them arms' length before you. As you do this, join Exercise E with it. When the arms are extended full length, don't spread them more than eight inches apart. As you pick up your arms, they will naturally pass your stomach. With few exceptions all gestures start this way (Fig. 10).



FIG. 11.



FIG. 12.

H. Drop the arms naturally in front of you at ease. Pick them up and extend them before you at arms' length. As you do, join Exercise *F* with it (Fig. 11). For a softer gesture the index finger may be slightly curved, as in Fig. 12.



FIG. 13.



FIG. 14.

I. Drop the arms naturally in front of you at ease. Slowly extend them in front of you, the hands closed, the palms down. As you raise the arms, join Exercise *E* with the movement, turning the hands over and extending the fingers, keeping them close together. Then bring the arms around to the sides, shoulder height. Finish as in Fig. 13. Repeating this gesture, combine it with Exercise *F*. Finish as in Fig. 14. Remember your hands are flesh and blood, not sticks. Keep them limber.



FIG. 15.

J. With the arms at ease in front of you, begin with Exercise G and go through all the previous exercises with the right hand. Then the left. Each gesture must be made separate and complete. When you finish each gesture, hold it for a second, drop the arm to first position, and begin the next.

K. With the arms at ease in front of you, alternate the arms and the hands. Begin with Exercise G and go through all the previous exercises, first the right and then the left. Make each gesture separate and complete. When you finish, drop the arm to the first position. Try to follow each gesture with your eyes and head.

L. With the arms at ease in front of you, take a short forward step with the right foot. At the same time, extend your right hand before you and do Exercise E, as in Figs. 6, 7, 8. The weight of your body must be on the foot you step forward on. Finish the gesture. Hold the pose for a second; then drop the arm and step back into the first position.

M. Repeat Exercise L. This time use the left hand and the left foot.

N. With the arms at ease in front of you, take a short forward step with the left foot. At the same time, do Exercise F with the left hand, as in Figs. 6, 7, 9.

O. Repeat Exercise N, this time using the right hand and the right foot.

P. With the arms at ease in front of you, take a short step to the right side. Put the weight of the body on the right foot. Turn slightly to the right as you do this. At the same time, use the right hand and complete the *E* gesture. Hold the pose for a second. Drop the arm and step back into first position. Now do the same gesture with Exercise *F*.

Q. Repeat Exercise *P*, this time stepping to the left side and using the left hand.

NOTE: As you step forward, try to coordinate the hands, the arms, the eyes, and the head into one complete move. All should begin at the same time and finish together in perfect rhythm.

Never make a gesture with the hands unless it means something. The same advice applies to every movement or piece of stage business used. Why do I say, keep the fingers close together when you are doing Exercise *E*? Just try the exercise with the fingers open. Notice how they lose all character and form. This also applies to Exercise *D*. Convince yourself before you continue further.

The rule of keeping the fingers close together is seldom broken. But it can be broken. If you held up your two hands in fright, your fingers would separate a little.

R. In Exercises *G* and *H*, don't spread the arms more than eight inches apart when they are extended before you. In this position the arms express force, directness. But keeping the arms eight inches apart is not a set rule. These two gestures can be spread to any distance you may see fit to use. The distance of the arms varies according to mood and meaning. If the arms are spread about two feet apart, palms up, they may suggest welcome, invitation, pleading. The same gesture, palms down, may be used by an orator for emphasis, or to still a crowd. Wide-flung, with palms up, the arms would express supplication.

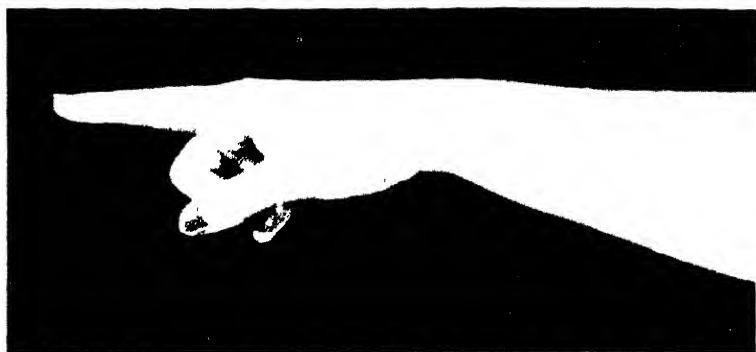


FIG. 16.

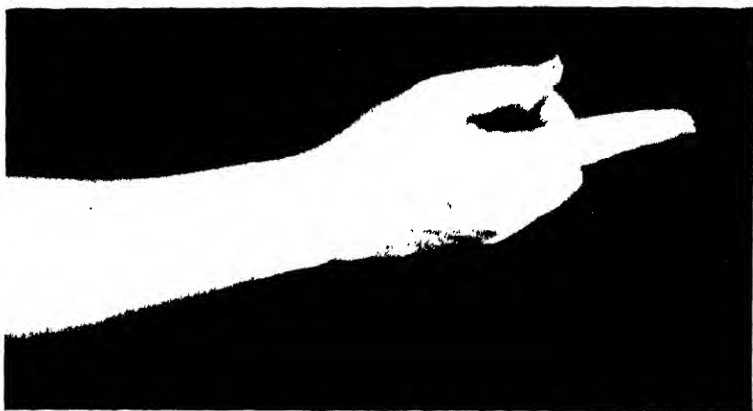


FIG. 17.

S. In Fig. 16, the forefinger is straight out, with the thumb resting on the second finger. You can use this gesture to point to an object or person.

T. You may use the same gesture in conversation to emphasize a point or to state a fact, as in Fig. 17.



FIG. 18.

U. If you point to the right, use your right hand. The same direction applies to pointing with your left hand. Never use the right hand to point to the left, because it would be an awkward move—yet the rule can be broken. By placing your right arm across your stomach, you could point and refer to something on your left, as in Fig. 18.

V. On giving a command or on ordering someone to leave the room, you point to the door through which you wish him to leave



FIG. 19.

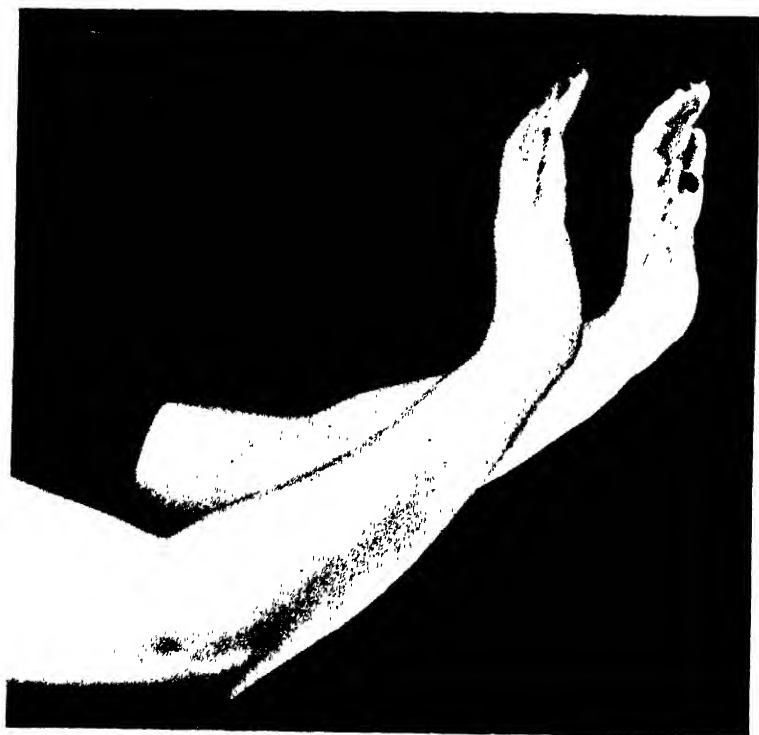


FIG. 20.

with a gesture that has force and character. Clench your hand, closing the thumb around the fingers. Keep the forefinger straight. Observe the note of authority in this gesture. It has force (Fig. 19).

W. Hold up the two hands before you, the palms away from you. Keep the fingers together, as in Fig. 20.

Imagine that you are trying to prevent someone from entering the room. Make the gesture and say, "Stop!" Suit the gesture to the word.

Imagine that your lover is leaving after a quarrel. Make the same gesture. Say, "Please, darling, wait!" Suit the action to the word. What I am trying to illustrate is this: All gestures are interchangeable. Each can be used to cover several different moods or situations. Your intelligence will give you the understanding necessary to make artistic use of them all.

Use the same gesture and indicate fright. This time break the rule concerning your fingers. Open them up a bit.

In animated conversation, the Latin races use their hands effectively. When they wish to emphasize a point or when they are stating a fact, the hands turn in, the thumbs out, all the fingers crooked up. They seem to shake the hands up and down.

The value of the hands in developing acting technique cannot be overestimated. In almost every part, from the handclap of childhood to the feeble clasp of old age, character effect can be broadened and intensified and made individual by the use of the hands.

Luther Adler, who played Golden Boy in Clifford Odets' play of that name, was a violinist and prize fighter. Carefully preserving his hands for the first art, he was forced to use them dangerously for the second. No one who saw the play will ever forget Mr. Adler's acting, whether he was fondling his violin, rubbing his fingers to keep them soft and supple, or doubling his fists before going into the ring. The effect showed years of carefully planned hand technique, brought into use in a series of superbly acted scenes.

Remember your hands, then, from the first handclasp in the opening scene to the farewell wave in the climax.

The Eyes

AS A means of influencing the mental state of his audience, the eye has no equal among the actor's physical instruments. It is more than a physical instrument; it is the channel through which the actor's inmost thoughts are permitted to pass.

The magnetic stage personality, when emotionally aroused and mentally alert, is able to send out a steady flow of dramatic power from the eyes. This power is felt by those who come within the range of the eye concentration.

In instances where the actor's will has been trained to a high degree and his eyes coordinated with his will, his thought processes can be so thoroughly revealed by an intense and dramatic glance that a pronounced physical reaction may be felt by his audience.

"He fixed her with his eyes." So goes the saying well known to theater audiences of bygone days as well as to readers of melodramatic fiction. The source of the expression must have been Trilby, who, glued to the spot by the burning glance of her mentor, Svengali, sang her most thrilling notes.

Even in these days, the eye business, called "the Svengali touch," is a smooth blending of practical psychology and artistic worth. No director can deny that the point of contact established between two players by use of the fixed glance is a very effective and powerful piece of stage direction. It sets the mood of the

scene; it determines the use of stage locations; it brings into play one of the actor's most valuable features: his eyes.

In the second act of "Show Boat," the Svengali touch was used with telling effect.

Captain Andy (Charles Winninger), a visitor at the Trocadero Café, sees his daughter Magnolia (Norma Terris), a café singer, for the first time in many years. When Magnolia's song is announced, she is greeted by boos and catcalls from the audience. Nervous and frightened, the girl starts to sing. There are more boos. Indignantly, Captain Andy tries to still the crowd. He stands by the table and calls Magnolia's name. When he catches his daughter's eye, he starts to direct her, just as he had always done on the show boat. A point of contact through the eyes is made, Captain Andy staring straight ahead, Magnolia fixing her eyes on her father as though in a trance. Down off the stage, she walks toward Captain Andy, singing all the while. As her confidence mounts, her voice soars to a magnificent climax.

At no time in the scene did Miss Terris take her eyes off Mr. Winninger's. Had she done so, the point of contact would have been broken and the strength of the scene correspondingly weakened.

What Do Your Eyes Say?

The eyes are our mental or intellectual barometers. David Belasco once said he could tell more about a new actress by ten minutes of watching her eyes than by a full hour of listening to her talk. Unless we close them or turn them away, our eyes reveal us for what we are.

The importance of the eye in acting is brought home when you consider that thought first dawns in the eye glance. Thinking alone will not put expression into the eye (for thought can often be uncommunicative) but thinking combined with intense feeling can make the eyes radiate warmth, flash with hatred, gleam with tenderness. They can be furtive or candid, feverish or steady, kind or bitter, as they turn from one mood to another.

The eye is the actor's subtlest tool, and if he knows how to use it, he can become the master of all the nuances of expression. The secret remains his own, too. No one can quite put a finger on how he gets his effect.

When Charles Laughton played Edward Barrett in "The Barretts of Wimpole Street," it was suggested that it might be well to tone down his performance of the bigoted, feverish old man. "Don't worry," Laughton assured his advisers, "I defy anyone to censor a gleam of the eye."

Holding an Audience with the Eyes

In order to capture and hold an audience's attention, every eye move made by the cast members must be positive. If a player shifts his eyes or makes a false move with them, he loses his audience. People who are watching a play can concentrate on only one point at a time; any independent move will lead them astray. By directing his gaze at the character he is speaking to, the actor shows the audience just where they should be looking. Actually, with his own eyes, the player focuses the vision of the audience.

Listening with the Eyes

By sitting still and keeping his gaze on the central scene or figure in a play, an actor on the side lines can increase the interest of the audience in that scene.

EXAMPLE

In "Abe Lincoln in Illinois," Abraham Lincoln (Raymond Massey) sat on the side lines and listened to the Stephen Douglas debate—a long speech without interruption.

The picture of Mr. Lincoln, a thoughtful, tense listener, eyes turned toward the speaker with interest and respect, encouraged the audience to be equally interested in what Stephen Douglas had to say.

If, on the other hand, Mr. Massey had looked around, inspected his nails, stared at the wings, or otherwise indicated indifference,

he might have created a mood of indifference on the other side of the footlights.

Coughing, flourishing a handkerchief, fanning oneself with a hat or paper, noisily turning over the pages of a book, lighting a cigarette—these and any number of other insignificant movements of an actor merely listening on the side lines, if made at the wrong moment, will kill the lines of the other players.

An ingénue, on bad terms with the star of the play—an older woman—had a scene in which she and the star drank cocktails. After the scene the ingénue made an exit, leaving the stage free for the star to play her big scene. Before leaving the stage, the ingénue purposely left her glass tottering precariously on the rim of her chair instead of placing it on the table.

The audience, fascinated, waited for the glass to fall. Whenever the star went near the chair, everyone stared and listened for the sound of splintered glass. The greatest acting in the world couldn't overcome the fascination of that small piece of tottering glassware!

An Actor Never Looks at the Audience

A successful vaudeville "single" was once engaged to play the lead in a legitimate play. The part called for a glib young man about town, and the actor fitted it like a glove.

Strange to say, things didn't go very well from the start. The actor met all the physical requirements; he was hard-working and intelligent and eager to please. But by the end of the week, the director had to admit that he was up against an impossible situation.

For fifteen years, this vaudeville actor had been holding his audience spellbound for twenty minutes by standing *in one spot* and *fixing his eyes on the audience* and *working straight at them*. Sometimes he even singled out one person in the audience and *worked to him*, pointing all his gags in his direction. *In other words, he established a relationship between himself and the audience.*

In the legitimate play, the actor played the part of a young man who, in a ticklish spot in a foreign country, surrounded by hostile people, parried for time until help could come. In handling the

part, not only did the performer revert to the vaudeville technique of addressing his lines to the audience (thus destroying the dramatic illusion) but he also tried to fix his eyes on every character on the stage (there were over sixty). As a result, he looked as though his head were on a pivot. By shifting his head and eyes, he dissipated his power. What he didn't know was that not only should the actor *never look directly into the audience, but he must direct his speech to the characters on the stage one at a time—and look at the character—and hold him with his eyes!*

Despite his years of experience in playing before an audience, the former vaudeville actor, when confronted by this simple stage mechanic, was a beginner.

Art of Paying Attention

In real life when someone speaks to us, we lift our eyes and gaze at the speaker, giving him our full attention. It is a mark of courtesy. On the stage the actor goes through the same eye movement, but he does not continue to stare at the other actor for the duration of the speech.

EXAMPLE

When listening to a long speech, the actor may concentrate the eyes on the speaker, then find a place where the speech affects him, and slowly turn front, focusing his eyes *above* the audience but not *on* them. He will then be in a position to give full expression to whatever his facial or body reaction may be. At the end of the speech, where he has a line in reply, he may turn back to the speaker.

This is a suggestion merely. It will not fit every situation, but it will help you to understand one of the most difficult pieces of business for a beginner.

Keep your head still. Practice the habit of a direct, steady look. Never gaze at the ceiling or down at the floor when you are speaking unless the part calls for such action.

This same action may be followed if the actor has an unusually long speech to deliver and he wants to break it. Begin the first part of the speech facing the listener. Then, while you are speaking, with a slow, steady movement, turn your head toward the audience. In this way the audience can get full value of your expression. Now focus your eyes on a spot just under the balcony and over the heads of the audience. Remember, as you turn, to extend the continuity of the dialogue. As the speech nears its end, turn back slowly so that, when you finish, you are again facing your companion.

EXAMPLES

Scene from "Boy Meets Girl," by Sam and Bella Spewack¹

Who could forget that Tristan-and-Isolde glance between Susie, the studio commissary waitress, and the young extra, Rodney, as they gaze into each other's eyes? Susie, in a love-at-first-sight daze, starts to tell the boy about herself. Rodney can't quite follow her story.

SUSIE

The minute I found out about Happy I said to myself: I'm going to be very good and very sincere, because then Happy will be very good and sincere.

RODNEY

I'm afraid I can't quite follow. . . .

SUSIE

(Sighing) Nobody does. . . .

RODNEY

(Staring at Susie in fascination) Eh? Oh, yes . . . as I was saying . . . What was I saying?

SUSIE

(Looking deeply into his eyes and feeling strangely stirred) Have some mustard?

¹ "Boy Meets Girl," by Sam and Bella Spewack. Reprinted by courtesy of Random House.

Scene from "The Beloved Rogue," by Lawrence Schwab and Lester
O'Keefe

In this Viennese operetta, which I directed for Lawrence Schwab, Marianna, a beautiful young widow, receives a visit from a handsome count at her castle. From the moment Marianna sees the count, she is fascinated, although she is unaware of his real identity. As she comes down the stairs, she keeps her eyes upon him.

MARIANNA

After all . . . I really should know who it is I am talking to.

STRANGER (the count)

One who is happy to at last see the famous Venus in Silk.

MARIANNA

My portrait? It's there on the stairway. (*The stranger continues to stare at Marianna*) But you're not looking at it!

STRANGER

(*Still staring deeply at her*) The picture is a masterpiece on the part of the painter . . . but the original is a masterpiece of nature.

Later in the same play, the count, who is still unknown to Marianna, says, looking at her, "Who could solve the riddle of those eyes?"

MARIANNA

Perhaps my fiancé . . . when he comes!

STRANGER

We have a saying in our family: "A marriage is pleasing in heaven only when the bride is in love."

MARIANNA

And what makes you think I'm not?

STRANGER

Your eyes!

Scene from "Smilin' Through," by Allan Langdon Martin¹

Kathleen (Jane Cowl), afraid her uncle will find her sweetheart visiting her in the garden, says:

KATHLEEN

What'll I do if he comes out?

KENNETH

(Grins) Pretend you don't see me.

KATHLEEN

(Giggles and sits down on the bench beside him) Uncle John knows I've good eyesight . . . where you're concerned.

KENNETH

(Eagerly) Kathleen . . . have you?

KATHLEEN

(Reminding him of the distance between them) Well, I'm kind of near-sighted at that.

KENNETH

(Moves closer) Is that better? Can you see me now? (He looks straight into her eyes)

Scene from "Pelléas and Mélisande," by Maurice Maeterlinck²

PELLÉAS

I did not know thou wert so beautiful! . . . I have never seen anything so beautiful before thee. . . . I was full of unrest; I sought throughout the country . . . and I found not beauty. . . . And now I have found thee! I have found thee! I do not think there could be on earth a fairer woman! Where art thou? . . . I no longer hear thee breathe. . . .

MÉLISANDE

Because I look on thee. . . .

¹ "Smilin' Through," by Allan Langdon Martin. Copyright, 1924, by Samuel French. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of Samuel French.

² "From "Pelléas and Mélisande," by Maurice Maeterlinck. Used by permission of Dodd, Mead & Company, Inc., and George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.

PELLÉAS

Why doest thou look so gravely on me? We are already in the shadow. . . . It is too dark under this tree. Come into the light. We cannot see how happy we are. Come, come, so little time remains to us. . . .

MÉLISANDE

No, no; let us stay here. . . . I am nearer thee in the dark. . . .

PELLÉAS

Where are thine eyes? Thou art not going to fly me? Thou dost not think of me just now.

MÉLISANDE

Oh, yes; oh, yes; I only think of thee. . . .

PELLÉAS

Thou wert looking elsewhere. . . .

MÉLISANDE

I saw thee elsewhere. . . .

The Eye Discovers

The act of looking at an object as though for the first time is a difficult one for the actor, especially after a long run of a play. Although he knows exactly where every object is located and just what is going to happen, his face must not reveal his knowledge. If it does, his playing loses its freshness.

For instance, if an actor knows he is to receive a letter in the second act telling him that he has won a sweepstake fortune, he waits until he actually reads the letter before he registers excitement.

EXAMPLES

Scene from "Show Boat" by Oscar Hammerstein, 2nd, and Jerome Kern

Against Parthy's wishes, Julie is secretly meeting Magnolia in the kitchen of the show boat. She enters breathlessly.

JULIE

I had a hard time getting here. . . . I just missed bein' caught by Parthy. (*Turning, she discovers a fresh pan of biscuits*) Oh! Look at Parthy's biscuits!

QUEENIE (the colored mammy)

Now look here, Miss Julie. Dinner'll be ready in five minutes.

JULIE

Oh, let me take a bite. (*She takes one and bites into it*) Joe'll help you make some more.

Scene from "First Lady," by Katherine Dayton and George S. Kaufman¹

In "First Lady," Lucy Wayne (Jane Cowl), one of the most brilliant and glamorous women in Washington, makes a sweeping entrance. She has been spending the afternoon at the Senate and is highly excited. As she bursts into the drawing room of her home, Lucy says:

Oh, how lovely everything looks! (*To the butler*) How nice, Charles! The table looks beautiful! You've arranged everything divinely. (*To her niece*) Emmy, child, you look charming! Thanks, Charles, I never saw so many flowers. Looks like a gangster's funeral.

Although every night before she made her first entrance, she knew exactly how the room was going to look, Miss Cowl had to project the feeling of rush, excitement, vitality, and surprise at the appearance of the room. Needless to say, she did it superbly!

Arrested Action

Arrested action means interrupted action, and much of the success of such action depends upon the eyes. Usually the move comes in a scene in which a player is taken by surprise. For instance, if you were intensely interested in a game of cards and suddenly heard a loud crash in the street, you would look up, startled. Your

¹ "First Lady," by Katherine Dayton and George S. Kaufman. Reprinted by courtesy of Random House.

body would be rigid, your hand would continue to clutch your cards, but the whole effect of suspense would be achieved by the expression of the eyes. Then, when you knew the noise was caused by a milk bottle falling onto the pavement, you would relax and continue your card game.

EXAMPLES

A striking example of arrested action occurs in "The Barretts of Wimpole Street." After dinner, with the entire family gathered in Elizabeth's bed-sitting-room, she announces they must leave soon, since Robert Browning is coming to call. Brother Henry adds another piece of exciting news—their father is going away for a few days. Henrietta, Elizabeth's younger sister, is so overjoyed that she begins to dance a polka. Her mood infects the others, and they joyously start to keep time to her dancing, clapping their hands. Unexpectedly Edward Barrett enters the room. Everyone stops dead and stares at him.

Scene from "Idiot's Delight," by Robert E. Sherwood¹

In the third act of "Idiot's Delight," Irene (Lynn Fontanne) tells Harry (Alfred Lunt) what she will wear in their mind-reading act.

IRENE

I shall wear a black velvet dress . . . very plain . . . my skin ivory white. I must have something to hold. One white flower. No! A little white . . . (*she listens to the scream of a siren warning of an air raid*) What's that?

HARRY

Sounds like a fire!

Suspended Action

In the second act of "The Barretts of Wimpole Street" is a fine example of suspended action.

Elizabeth Barrett (Katharine Cornell) is in her room reading a volume of Browning. In one hand is the book, in the other a glass

¹ "Idiot's Delight," by Robert E. Sherwood, Charles Scribner's Sons.

containing medicine. So deeply absorbed is she that her other hand, raising the glass of medicine, remains poised in mid-air as she continues her reading.

Range of Vision

Self-centered people invariably keep their eyes on themselves: they literally do not see very far beyond their own noses. The range of their vision is limited to their own persons.

The self-centered man flicks imaginary dust or lint from his suit. He tugs with his cuff links, studies his wrist watch, stares at his shoes, looks down at his tie, sees that his handkerchief in his breast pocket is folded just so.

The self-centered girl is a nail inspector. She smoothes her dress, produces a compact and goes to work. Lipstick, powder, rouge she applies, even though everyone in the restaurant or subway be watching. She pats her hair, admires her slippers, fusses with her gloves and handbag.

The range of an actor's thought can be indicated by the range of his vision.

EXAMPLES

Scene from "Come Out of the Kitchen," by A. E. Thomas¹

In "Come Out of the Kitchen," when Burton Crane, the Northerner, arrives to take possession of the house he has rented from Olivia Dangerfield (Ruth Chatterton), he says to Mr. Weeks, the agent:

Awfully good of you, Mr. Weeks, to welcome me in person. (*Takes off coat and drops it on a chair left of center door*) I suppose this is the drawing room. (*He looks around the room*) Ah, yes, the usual family portrait, I see. (*He picks up a miniature*) Oh, I say, this is delightful. (*Discovery*)

WEEKS

Yes, it's a sort of heirloom.

¹ "Come Out of the Kitchen," by A. E. Thomas. Copyright, 1921, by A. E. Thomas. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of Samuel French.

CRANE

(Looks about and crosses to chair left of table right center) Rather nice furniture.

WEEKS

Yes, it's all very old. (Crosses to chair left of table left center)

CRANE

I believe you. Quite sure it's safe to sit on?

Scene from "First Lady," by Katherine Dayton and George S. Kaufman¹

A portrait also plays an important part as a point of interest in the play, "First Lady." It is a likeness of Lucy Chase Wayne's grandfather, President Chase.

Ann, a visitor, in looking about the living room of Lucy Wayne, says there are only three rooms in Washington that have real American atmosphere.

MRS. IVES

(Looking up at the portrait) It's the portrait of old President Chase. Somehow he's still presiding. . . .

ANN

Well, that's part of it, of course. (Her eyes linger on the painting for a moment) You know, Mrs. Wayne has that same look around the eyes, hasn't she? Or rather behind the eyes. But of course she gets her beauty from her mother. That heavenly portrait in the drawing room.

Scene from "Ethan Frome," by Owen and Donald Davis²

ETHAN

There's lots of stars out tonight though . . . ain't there?

¹ "First Lady," by Katherine Dayton and George S. Kaufman. Reprinted by courtesy of Random House.

² "Ethan Frome." by Owen and Donald Davis, Charles Scribner's Sons.

MATTIE

Ain't there just? (*She stands beside him, gazing up*) Did you ever try to count 'em at all? . . . Oh, my . . . don't it seem like there's most a million of them?

ETHAN

A-yeah. . . . There's more'n that.

MATTIE

(*Amazed at his knowledge*) What do you know?

ETHAN

A-yeah. (*He points eagerly*) See that one . . . that big fellow there to the right . . . see? . . . I think they call him Aldebaron . . . or some such.

MATTIE

(*Incredulously*) They do!

ETHAN

(*Rapidly*) And that bright one . . . that's Orion. . . . And that bunch of little ones . . . no, over there . . . see? Swarming about there?

MATTIE

I see! Ain't they, though . . . just like a little flock of bees! (*She glances at him and then up at the sky again*) Oh, dear! Don't it look like it was all painted?

Eyes uplifted suggest a religious mood, real or affected. In "Idiot's Delight," Weber, the munitions maker, says to Irene:

Yes, my dear. You know a great deal. But don't forget to do honor to Him . . . up there . . . who put fear into man. I am but the humble instrument of His Divine Will.

IRENE

(*Looks upward*) Yes . . . that's quite true. We don't do half enough justice to Him. Poor, lonely old soul. Sitting up in Heaven, with nothing to do but play solitaire. Poor, dear God. Playing Idiot's Delight. The game that never means anything, and never ends.

In "Reunion in Vienna," a sophisticated love scene was expressed through the eyes of Alfred Lunt, the gay archduke who persuaded his former sweetheart (now a happily married woman) to meet him at Frau Sacher's. As she stands, serene and lovely as a goddess in a beautiful white evening gown, the archduke walks around her slowly, adoring her with his eyes. "How good of you to preserve your figure against the day of my return," he says at last.

Use of Eyes in Comedy

All comedians use their eyes to get comedy effects, and some, in so doing, have developed distinctive styles. The one thing you remember about their performance is the way they use their eyes.

There are Eddie Cantor's popeyes, the way he lifts his brows and rolls his eyes. And Ed Wynn's eyes, with their heavy dark brows and expression of perpetual surprise. The more bewildered the Wynn stare, the more sharply suspended are his brows. Jimmy Savo, the pantomimist, like Harry Langdon, uses his eyes sadly and wistfully. To add to his characterization of a puzzled boob, Harold Lloyd adopted glassless spectacles.

In a comedy scene between two people, the eyes of one actor look at one object and describe it, while the eyes of the second actor are focused on a second object. To each point of description by the first actor, the second agrees.

EXAMPLE

Two men are seated on the beach.

FIRST MAN

(*Looking at a beautiful boat in the water*) Gosh! She's a beauty. . . . Look at those graceful lines . . . a real thoroughbred.

SECOND MAN

(*Gazing admiringly at a lovely girl near by*) She certainly is!

FIRST MAN

I'd like to spend the rest of my life with her traveling to far-off places . . . just the two of us.

SECOND MAN

(*Still gazing at the girl*) You've got my idea exactly.

FIRST MAN

(*Turning to second man*) Say . . . what's to stop us from chipping together and buying her?

SECOND MAN

(*Pulling his gaze from the girl . . . looking startled*) Huh?

FIRST MAN

(*Sees girl for the first time*) Oh . . . I see!

Exit with the Eyes

The eyes are the point of focus in many stage exits, whether the effect be comic or tragic.

EXAMPLES

1. The shy awkward servant, in withdrawing from his mistress, backs off apologetically toward the door, *eyes still riveted upon her*. On his way he manages to bump clumsily into every piece of furniture in his wake.

2. The humble courtier in the presence of his sovereign respectfully backs away, head bent, *eyes focused on the sovereign*.

3. The lover, who has to tear himself from the beloved, backs away, filling his eyes with every detail of her beauty, to be hoarded in his memory. The effect of such a scene is that of two pairs of eyes binding a man and woman together, and, as they part, straining almost to the breaking point.

4. When the police drag away the criminal, he looks back, glares, and shouts back at the informer who tipped off the police, "I'll be back! I'll get even with you for this!"

5. The first separation of a mother and child. The mother *watches* until long after the train or automobile carries the child out of sight. In the play, "Turn to the Right," this situation was reversed. The mother waited at the window every night, watching for the return of her son.

Eyebrows

Whether they be as thin and plucked as Marlene Dietrich's or thick and bristling as Lionel Barrymore's, the eyebrows are an important feature in contributing to a variety of facial expressions. Every new actor must learn how to use his brows effectively without becoming an "eyebrow actor." A facile eyebrow is one thing; an uncontrolled one is another.

The raised eyebrow shows anger, surprise, shock, disapproval, disdain, amusement, hurt feelings, fear, boredom.

When one brow is raised and the other drawn down the effect is that of quizzical humor.

The brows drawn in two oblique angles (raised high at the bridge of the nose and drawn down at the outer corners) give the effect of supplication, pleading, pain.

The brows contracted a little in a frown express concentration, annoyance, deep thought.

The brows compressed strongly in a scowl express intense anger and hatred.

Eye Exercises

Study the eyes in a mirror. Open and close the lids slowly and watch how the eyes function. Examine the *pupil* (the round dark spot in the center of the eyeball), and the *iris* (the circle that surrounds the *pupil*), which may be brown, blue, gray, or black. Then study the area surrounding the *iris*, which we call the "white of the eye."

In the movement of the upper eyelid lies the range of eye expression. The lower lid moves only when we squint the eye or concentrate steadily on some object. When this action of the lower lid occurs, the lid is brought upward. The upward movement of the lower lid expresses *obstinacy* or *doubt*.

EXERCISES

The exercises that follow are arranged to increase the spontaneity of eye expression and at the same time to strengthen the



FILET

Expressions of the eyes.

muscles and nerves of the eyes. In doing the exercises, care should be taken to avoid eyestrain. When the eyes grow tired, let them rest.

1. Take a coin between the thumb and the forefinger. Hold it before you. Swing it around, describing a circle. Let your eyes follow it. Hold the head still. Describe a circle to the right, then to the left. Repeat a few times and rest.

2. Sit in a chair. Read a book. Without moving the head, look up from the book, first right, then left. Now combine the movement with the head. Let the eyes react first before you move the head. In other words, lead with the eyes. Now try moving the eyes and the head simultaneously.

3. *Rest, calm, repose, inactivity*: Look in your mirror. Open the eyes and let the upper lid stop halfway between the pupil and the iris. This is the position of your lids when you are in repose.

4. *Indifference*: Look in your mirror. Bring the upper lid down a trifle so that it rests on the top of the pupil. This will give you an expression of unconcern. The question you are contemplating is unimportant.

5. *Energy, keen interest, intensity*: Look in your mirror. Open the eyes a little so that the upper lid is just above or resting on the iris. This gives an expression of intense interest.

6. *Reflection, thought, study*: Look in your mirror. Let the upper lid come down halfway over the pupil. This is the position of the lid when a person is lost in thought or contemplation.

7. *Animation, spirit, energy*: Look in the mirror. Open the eye until you see the white of your eye between the upper lid and the iris. In this position, the eye registers animation, excitement. For example, you are watching a stunting airplane.

8. *Observation, examination, concentration*: Nearsighted people squint or scrutinize closely something just beyond their eyes. The lower lid comes up, and the eye seems to close a bit. (They do this in order to get a better focus.) When the object comes into sight (if it happens to be something familiar) the eye opens, and the face lights up with recognition. Study this expression, because the element of transition is closely allied to it. This same expression

may be used by an actor who is concentrating on an important problem. As the solution comes, his eyes relax, illuminated by the thought.

9. *Shock, fright, thrill*: Look in your mirror. Open the eyes widely, but do not strain them. Hold for a few seconds. Then open them wider and throw an intense expression into them. A wide circle of white will surround the iris. The effect is almost that of a concentrated stare. This expresses shock, fright, terror.

10. *Change Exercise 2 to 9.*

a. Assume the position of Exercise 2. Your head is bent over a book. Now a man covers you with a gun. You look up.

b. When you see the man, register fright. Open the mouth slightly to intensify the expression.

11. *Change Exercise 2 to 4.*

a. When you look up, a man is covering you with a gun.

b. Show indifference to the gun. Curl up the edge of your mouth in disdain. You are fearless.

12. *Change Exercise 9 to 6.*

a. Assume the expression of a person who has just heard something exciting.

b. Now imagine that it was a mistake—the thing you thought about to happen is called off.

13. *Change Exercise 8 to 9.*

a. Assume a look of close scrutiny. You've put your pearls away for safekeeping.

b. They aren't in the jewel box. They've disappeared! Panic seizes you.

Breath Control

IN THE third act of one of the season's established hits, the leading lady, a newcomer to Broadway and a natural for the part, went into her big scene. She was a pretty young thing with a round baby face and a gentle Southern drawl. Pretty and gentle, that is, until the scene rose to the crisis.

Then the effect changed. The girl's face reddened furiously; her eyes bulged. The cords in her throat stuck out like those of an aged turkey gobbler. Her voice was shrill and rasping.

Said the lady who sat beside me, "She'd better look out. She'll have a stroke!"

Said I, "I hope the understudy is standing by. She'll have an attack of laryngitis from throat strain."

For the actress was talking from the throat and not from the diaphragm. She was, to use the expression, literally "yelling from the top of her lungs," without support of the diaphragm muscles. As a result of wrong breathing, the sound she produced was ugly and constrained.

Breath rings up the curtain of life, and it rings it down. Yet the breathing apparatus of the average person is given very little attention. "As natural as breathing," we say and let it go at that.

Actually, about the only natural breathing we do takes place when we are asleep. In sleep we breathe deeply, regularly, and smoothly, and consequently we are rested and refreshed. But when

we are awake, most of us breathe high, using the chest only. We gasp and pant in little shallow puffs. Some of the cells of our lungs are used so infrequently that when a student of breath control first takes up deep breathing exercises he feels faint. He has no conception of his breathing capacity.

Deep Breathing

The upper seven ribs (the chest) are fastened to the breastbone. They are stationary; they cannot be stretched. But the lower five ribs (the diaphragm) are connected by muscles, a series of elastic bands that can be stretched at will. Since there is a limit to expansion of the seven upper ribs, high breathing or "chest breathing" can never be so sustained as low, deep breathing from the diaphragm.

Test for Deep Breathing

Lie flat on the bed. Hold the hands on the diaphragm. Feel how it expands and contracts in a steady, easy rhythm. Feel the muscles work! Then rise and stand erect. Breathe low and deep ten times.

When the strong, resilient diaphragm muscles work, your throat relaxes and gives forth full, rich tones. Thus, I place emphasis on breath control for tone control.

Breath Attack

Force of speaking depends on the way we distribute our breath—whether it flows out easily or whether it is pushed out. The degree of pressure against the vocal cords measures the volume of audible sound.

There are three forms of breath distribution:

1. Effusive
2. Expulsive
3. Explosive

Effusive: The effusive attack is produced by steady pressure of the abdominal muscles, pumping an even flow of air into the lungs and from there into the throat. This attack we use in normal speaking. It is a natural, relaxed sound.

Example: "What a lovely night . . . so nice I hate to go in."

Expulsive: The expulsive style is achieved by more vigorous pressure of the abdominal muscles. This produces a firm, positive tone. This style is used in moments of excitement, off stage and on, particularly in sustained scenes. It denotes excitement, interest, activity.

Example: "Well . . . if you think I'm going to stand here and do nothing about it . . . you're wrong."

Explosive: The explosive attack is a sharp, definite pressure of the abdominal muscles. The sound produced is spasmodic, jerky, and intense. This attack we use in shouting, laughing, screaming.

Example: "Hey . . . What's going on there?"
"Help! Ahoy!"

Only when you have complete control of the diaphragm muscles can you have complete ease in speaking on the stage. Only then can you be sure of reserve breath when you need it.

If your stomach muscles are expanding and contracting under your direction you can even take a breath in the middle of a phrase. You can always be sure of rapid execution of speech and of meeting the pace called for by the part. When the scene is speeded, the actor must call on an extra supply of breath, just as an engine calls for more steam or gas when it is moving at a rapid pace.

Often the tempo of an entire scene depends on the work of one player. If she has the tone control that comes from sustained, deep breathing, she can lift any scene or set any pace. If she hasn't breath control, she'll find herself in the unenviable position of the girl in our story: puffing and panting, her face an unlovely red.

Breath control, then, is necessary in playing:

1. Sustained dramatic scenes
2. Long emotional scenes that build up to a big climax.

3. Farce speech that requires rapid delivery
4. Any speech for:
 - a. Quick delivery on cues
 - b. Phrasing

Analysis of Sustained Playing

The following speech from "Victoria Regina," spoken by Queen Victoria, illustrates sustained playing. Read it. Then memorize the lines and try to speak them to the best of your ability.

Scene from "Victoria Regina," by Laurence Housman¹

QUEEN VICTORIA

Yes. But I shall have to go as I am. I can't get up. It's very gratifying, very, to find . . . after all these years . . . that they do appreciate all that I have tried to do for them . . . for their good, and for this great country of ours. We have been so near together today . . . they and I; all my dear people of England, Scotland, and Wales . . . and Ireland, and the dear Colonies, and India. From all round the world I have had messages. Such loyalty . . . such devotion! Most extraordinary! But tell Mr. Chamberlain how very much I approve of all the arrangements he made for the proper representation of all parts of my Empire in the Procession. Everything so perfectly in order. Most gratifying . . . So happy! As we were coming back . . . you were in front, Beatrice, so perhaps you didn't see . . . it was just by Hyde Park Corner, there was a great crowd there; and a lot of rough men . . . of course it ought not to have happened, but it didn't matter . . . broke right through the lines of the police and troops guarding the route; they ran alongside the carriage, shouting and cheering me. And I heard them say: "Go it, Old Girl! You've done it well!" Of course, very unsuitable . . . the words; but so gratifying! And, oh, I hope it's true! I hope it's true! I must go to them now. Have the windows opened. Hark! How they are cheering. Albert! Ah! if only you could have been here!

As you speak these lines, place the hands on the diaphragm muscles. Do you feel the steady pumping of the muscles as they

¹ "Victoria Regina," by Laurence Housman, Charles Scribner's Sons.

work to give you the right amount of breath for sustained speaking? The muscles, if used correctly, are just as reliable in their way as the bellows that are part of a pipe organ.

The wall of the muscle between your chest and your digestive tract is the motive force that pushes the column of air up against the vocal cords strung on your larynx and makes them vibrate. If your diaphragm is well developed, you'll have breath control.

Breath Conservation in Playing an Emotional Scene

As a scene builds to a climax, the pitch of the voice rises, and the pace increases. The actor must always anticipate this and keep breath power in reserve. If he doesn't, his breath will weaken just when he needs it most.

EXAMPLE

Scene from "Seventh Heaven," by Austin Strong¹

In "Seventh Heaven," Helen Menken (Diane) was called upon to play a difficult scene that mounted steadily in pace and pitch.

Diane's domineering sister, Nana, has come to take her from her husband, Chico, the street cleaner.

NANA

Come here to me!

(*Her face is livid and swollen with drink*) I've been hiding in the hall till your sewer man got out!

DIANE

Nana . . . you're ill!

NANA

Huh! Didn't Boul tell you I needed you . . . that I wanted you to come back to me? (*She moves toward Diane*)

¹ "Seventh Heaven," by Austin Strong. Copyright, 1922, by Austin Strong and John Golden. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of Samuel French.

DIANE

Yes . . . but Chico's just gone. I must . . . *(She moves toward the door)*

NANA

(Stopping her and speaking exultantly) The war's got him.

DIANE

(Quietly) Nana, please . . . I want to see him once more. *(She crosses left. The medal hanging from Diane's neck attracts Nana's eye. She clutches it and tears it from Diane)*

NANA

What's this thing? Something he gave you?

DIANE

Give that back, I tell you. *(Nana throws medal on floor)*

NANA

Come here to me! *(She takes from under her shawl a snakelike whip)*

DIANE

I'm not afraid of you, Nana.

NANA

Huh!

DIANE

I'm not afraid, I tell you!

NANA

Come here to me! *(Diane does not move. Nana approaches her and raises the whip. Without a word, Diane springs on her and they struggle; Nana gives Diane a look of terror; then Diane throws her upper center left, overturning a chair and tearing the whip from her hand)*

DIANE

Nana, I'll kill you! *(She lashes Nana, who stumbles around back of table to door)* You can never frighten me again! I am brave! I am not

afraid! I am brave! I am the wife of Chico! (*She throws the whip at Nana's retreating figure down the stairs, runs to the window, waving her shawl to the marching soldiers below as the band increases in volume*) Chico! Chico! Chico! I am brave!

Breath Control in Farce Playing

Farce is a combination of fast playing and rapid speaking. There is a great deal of hiding in closets, under beds, behind curtains, on balconies, and running in and out of doors. The life of farce playing is speed in both action and dialogue. Then, if ever, the actor needs breath control. The effect called for is one of vibrancy of voice, speed of action, and resiliency of body. "Staccato playing," some producers call it.

EXAMPLE

Scene from an original Farce Play

Linda, an actress, has inveigled John Milbrook, a conservative banker, into backing a new play, written by her ex-husband, Tom, in which she will appear opposite her favorite leading man, Daryl. Linda makes an appointment with Milbrook, who is infatuated with her, to meet at her dressing room in the theater between matinee and evening performance, to discuss the play. To her embarrassment, both Daryl and Tom take this opportunity to come to the dressing room as well.

Jiggs, the maid, is busily brushing her mistress's furs when a loud knock is heard at the door. She ignores the knock and carries the furs to the closet, up right. The door opens. In swaggers a handsome young man.

DARYL

Either lock it or answer it, Jiggs. . . . (*He tosses his derby hat on a chair, goes over to the table upon which is Linda's lean supper tray. He gazes at it for a second and shudders*) Thank God . . . I'm a man!

JIGGS

You better git . . . Mr. Milbrook's expected. . . .

DARYL

(Flops into a chair) Angel without wings. . . .

JIGGS

Miss Linda'll be mighty mad. . . . *(There's a knock at the door. Jiggs looks frightened)* Lord! It's him!

DARYL

(Wags his finger) It's he. . . .

JIGGS

Him . . . and you scat! *(She pushes him to the closet and slams the door . . . seeing his hat on the table, quickly hides it on the high shelf. She opens the door)* . . . Oh, it's you!

TOM

It's I. . . . *(He tosses his derby on the table)*

JIGGS

(Stands with arms folded) Humph! Double talk. . . . What you want?

TOM

A kiss . . . honey. *(He pretends to chase her. Jiggs screams and runs away)*

LINDA

(Enters breathlessly . . . is obviously annoyed to see Tom) Well . . .

TOM

(Pulls out a manuscript and tosses it on the table) First act swell . . . second act . . . maybe . . . third act . . . nix. . . . *(He goes toward her)* Love me?

LINDA

(Moves away quickly) No . . . I mean . . . yes. . . .

TOM

Cute little cannibal. *(He pulls her into his arms)* Let's get married again. *(Linda stands rigid as she hears a knock at the door. Jiggs drops the costume she is mending)*

LINDA

(Pulling Tom toward the closet) Right there. . . .

JIGGS

(Takes his arm . . . pulls him in the opposite direction, toward the bathroom) Right there. . . .

TOM

(Standing pat) Where?

LINDA

There! (She pushes him quickly into the bathroom . . . runs back to her dressing table and begins to sing very loudly)

JIGGS

(Takes Tom's derby and hides it on the shelf . . . then opens the door) Good evening, Mr. Milbrook . . . (Jiggs takes his derby and absent-mindedly puts it on the shelf with the two others)

LINDA

(Jumps up . . . extends her hands) Darling!

MILBROOK

(Overcome at the idea of being in an actress's dressing room) Flowers. . . . (Sits down stiffly)

LINDA

How sweet. . . . (Goes to table . . . picks up box) Cigarette? (Opens box) Oh!

MILBROOK

(Jumps up) What's wrong?

LINDA

(Holds up box) Empty!

MILBROOK

I'll get some. (Starts for door)

LINDA

(Pretends to stop him but is really pushing him) Oh, no!

MILBROOK

Be right back . . . oh, my hat. . . . *(Jiggs runs to shelf and hands him the wrong derby, which teeters on his head)*

LINDA

(Slams the door . . . rushes back to room) Come out . . . quick! *(The bathroom and closet doors open simultaneously, and two heads pop out. Tom rushes out. . . . Daryl ducks back unseen)*

TOM

(Indicates door through which Millbrook has disappeared) Who?

LINDA

Our future. . . .

TOM

Love him?

LINDA

No!

TOM

Me?

JIGGS

(From screened alcove) Telephone, Miss Linda. . . . *(Linda disappears behind screen. Tom goes for his hat on the shelf . . . sees two derbies . . . shrugs and returns to bathroom)*

LINDA

(Rushes back into room . . . looks around . . . sees Tom has left) Gone. . . . Thank heavens!

JIGGS

Who's gone? *(Looking on shelf and seeing two hats)*

LINDA

Get me the blue foxes. . . . (*Jiggs opens closet door. A loud sneeze is heard*) Catching a cold?

JIGGS

(*Trying to keep Daryl from coming out*) It ain't a cold. (*The noise of their struggle attracts Linda*)

LINDA

(*Furious*) Daryl!

DARYL

(*Sneezing and sputtering*) Linda . . . I . . . kerchoo . . . camphor! (*He points to closet*)

LINDA

Get out! (*Pushes him to the outer door. . . . A knock interrupts*) Get in. . . . (*Rushes him to the bathroom. Jiggs opens outer door and admits Mr. Milbrook*)

MILBROOK

(*Hands his hat to Jiggs, who puts it on the shelf*) Made it. . . . Three minutes flat (*Extends several cartons of cigarettes . . . sinks into chair and mops his face. There's a knock at the door. . . . Jiggs answers it . . . comes back into the room*)

JIGGS

It's a newspaper gentleman about the new play. . . .

MILBROOK

Great Scott! I'd better go. . . .

LINDA

Why?

MILBROOK

(*He looks embarrassed*) Well. . . .

LINDA

I understand. *(She pushes him back into chair. To Jiggs)* Tell him I'll be right down. . . . *(As soon as she leaves, Mr. Milbrook goes to shelf . . . finds three derby hats. . . . He whistles loudly)*

MILBROOK

Whew! *(He grabs the first one . . . which is the wrong size . . . and in his confusion runs to the bathroom door and disappears. Jiggs dashes in and crosses to the closet)*

JIGGS

Come out! *(Sees it empty)* Oh! *(She runs to the shelf and sees that two hats still remain. The sound of angry male voices rises from the direction of the bathroom . . . a scuffling noise follows. . . . The door bursts open, and the three men dash out)*

DARYL

(Trying to snatch hat off Milbrook) That's mine!

MILBROOK

(Snatches it back again and glares) Sir!

BOTH

(Exclaiming) Who are you?

BOTH

Linda's fiancé!

TOM

(Throws himself on couch and roars) Ha . . . ha . . . ha . . . ha . . . ha . . . ha . . .

MILBROOK and DARYL

(Simultaneously) Who are you?

TOM

Her husband!

DARYL

Impossible!

MILBROOK

Ridiculous!

TOM

But true. . . . Past . . . present . . . future. . . . Ha . . . ha . . .
ha . . . ha . . . ha!

LINDA

(*Bursts into the room*) Well . . .

MILBROOK

(*Crosses to her*) Linda . . . do you like me?

LINDA

Of course, pet. . . .

DARYL

You *are* fond of me?

LINDA

Certainly. . . .

TOM

If memory serves me. . . .

LINDA

Yes. . . .

ALL THREE

Then *whom* are you going to marry? (*There is a gentle knock at the door.*
All stand rigid)

JIGGS

(*Opens door and reveals a tall, handsome Russian carrying a music
portfolio*) Your accompanist. . . .

LINDA

My accompanist!

Read these lines, first slowly, to get the idea, and then rapidly, until you can keep the pace and mood of farce playing. As the pace increases, be sure that the breathing is steady and rhythmic.

Breath Control for Quick Cue Pickup

You have seen an actor's lips working silently as he waits for his cue while the other actors speak their lines. He is mouthing their lines to himself so that when his cue comes he will be ready. A quick pickup on the cue is vitally important at all times. Sometimes a matter of a split second of delay will kill the entire scene.

Break Speech

A break speech gives the effect of an actor cutting in, either to interrupt or to help along the thought of another actor. Break speech requires sensitive timing, and sensitive timing can be realized only when the breath is under control.

EXAMPLE

(Helping the Thought)

GIRL: Why, I thought . . .

BOY: You thought I'd gone away, and that you'd never see me again. That's it, isn't it?

EXAMPLE

(Interruption of Thought)

FIRST CHILD: Daddy brought some books and games. . . .

SECOND CHILD: And candy, too!

Tempo

Each play has an established tempo. By tempo I do not mean the speed with which one player alone delivers a speech; I mean the *pace of the entire performance*. The pace of a well-balanced play rises and falls continuously with a special climactic build-up at each curtain. But each character, by his natural speed of playing (walking and body movements) and voice timbre (thin, heavy, sharp, or

soft) can influence the tempo of a play. It is the give and take or blending of these elements that makes the perfect whole.

EXAMPLE

In a highly dramatic scene in "Show Boat," where the dialogue has mounted to a high pitch, the sheriff walks slowly over to Parthy Hawks (Edna May Oliver), a true daughter of New England, and draws:

HAWKS: You look like a respectable woman.

PARTHY: I *am*!

By her sharp, incisive attack (characteristic in tone, brevity, and perfectly timed inflection) Miss Oliver gained one of the biggest laughs in the show. It relieved a tension which had grown almost unbearable as the tempo rose to a high peak. It was the psychological moment for a laugh, and the audience welcomed it.

In the miscegenation scene in "Show Boat," a tense and dramatic moment, Julie has been exposed as being partly colored and has left the show boat with her husband, Steve. All the cast of actors and colored help, stunned, huddle in silent groups. The tempo of the play has dropped to a lull. Charles Winniger (Captain Andy) picks up the tempo by yelling, "Well, what're y' all standin' around for like a lot of tree stumps . . . ? Clear out, the whole lot of you. . . . Go on!"

Both these scenes show explosive attack and quick cue pickup.

Overlapping Dialogue

Overlapping dialogue occurs when two or more groups on the stage are talking and their respective conversations have no relation to each other. For instance, one group may discuss the weather while the other group (probably on the opposite side of the stage) are talking about food. Because the train of thought in scenes of this kind isn't logical, picking up the cue becomes particularly important.

EXAMPLES

In the Group Theatre play, "The Gentle People," the girl's father and his friend are in a rowboat discussing fishing, while above them on the pier, his daughter (Sylvia Sidney) and the gangster (Franchot Tone) talk about the *Normandie*, which is heading out to sea.

Scene from "Music in The Air," by Oscar Hammerstein, 2nd., and Jerome Kern

Bruno, a composer, and Frieda, a singer, sweethearts of "Music in the Air," have quarreled. So have Karl and Segilinde, also sweethearts. They meet at an outdoor garden, Bruno with Segilinde, and Karl with Frieda. They take separate tables at opposite sides of the stage, but each speaks loudly enough for the other to hear.

BRUNO

(At one table, to Segilinde) You know what I told you this afternoon about your singing? Maybe you will have an opportunity to go on the stage sooner than you expect. Maybe in a real big part. *(Frieda at other table laughs. Bruno calls to Frieda)* What are you laughing at?

FRIEDA

I just thought of something funny.

BRUNO

(Turns his back to Frieda) You know, Segilinde, the charming thing about your singing is that you are not like a typical prima donna. *(He looks meaningfully in the direction of Frieda)* Bill, please.

WAITER

For four?

FRIEDA

(At opposite table) No! Separate checks!

BRUNO

(*To Segilinde*) I shall never forget coming into that office this afternoon, seeing you, so sweet, so unaffected. . . . How did that little thing go? (*Segilinde sings*)

FRIEDA

(*Very annoyed at other table*) Come, Karl.

Phrasing

Phrasing gives light and shade to a speech. Some words are naturally more important in a sentence than others. We accentuate some; we slight others. Phrasing also means the grouping of words in relation to thought. Just as some words in a sentence are more important than others, so some sentences are more important in a paragraph.

The actor must recognize this: he must know where to pause, which sentences to run together and which sentences to break up. Again the breath is called upon, for we break the thought by pausing for breath. The appearance of a period does not always mean stop. Sometimes the natural place to pause is in the middle of a line, where no punctuation is indicated.

EXAMPLE

Scene from "Show Boat," by Oscar Hammerstein, 2nd., and Jerome Kern

MAGNOLIA

Why do you love Steve?

JULIE

I don't know. . . . He's such a *bad actor* on the stage. And he *thinks* he's so good. . . . Maybe *that's* why I love him. . . . *You see*, child . . . *love's* a funny thing. . . . There's no *sense* to it. . . . *That's why* you got to be so *careful* when it comes *creeping up on you*.

The broken lines indicate the points where pause gives meaning to a thought. The words italicized are accented for color and variety.

Don't Shout, Please!

Very often, in his effort to create greater force through exercise of his breathing apparatus, the actor overdoes the process and thereby ruins the artistic effect of his playing. In his zealous effort to be heard, he forgets proper breath control and tenses all his body muscles.

This cause may be emotional, especially in the case of an inexperienced actor, but once in a while well-trained actors with many years' experience find themselves up against the same problem.

Fredric March and Florence Eldridge, who played the leads in the mammoth production, "The American Way," had to get used to an immense auditorium and stage and a cast of 250 people plus a brass band.

For at least a week before the opening, the actors were worried lest their voices should fail to carry. They had people sitting all over the house listening. And these people came running to them with the news that they couldn't hear what Miss Eldridge and Mr. March were saying. So the actors fell into the habit of shouting their lines. Things were all right out in front then, but not with the players; in a day or so both were out of rehearsals with laryngitis, caused by the unaccustomed strain on the vocal cords.

Mr. March and Miss Eldridge didn't know what to do. They were used to quiet, intimate acting—the kind where you can turn your back on the stage and speak in a low voice if that seems natural. But "The American Way" was a play in which they must face front and shout. The audience at the Center Theatre must be reached.

Finally a well-known voice coach came to their rescue.

"Don't shout," she advised. "Speak naturally. If you throw a pebble into a pond, it makes a very small dent where it strikes the water, but, if the force behind the throwing is strong enough, the

dent keeps on spreading farther and farther in circles. That spot in the center is your *breath control area*, where you begin to speak, but the voice spreads out from the center until it reaches the rim of one of the big circles."

If the breathing is right, an actor can depend on his voice to gain in power as it leaves his diaphragm and moves out, in circles, to the top seat in the gallery of the largest auditorium.

I Can Hear You Breathe!

When an actor speaks, it should not be possible to hear the inhaling or exhaling of his breath. There is no surer sign of the ham actor than the vague, meaningless panting that accompanies some of his important speeches. Listen in on any radio, and you'll hear what I mean. The little gasping noises in the girl's throat as she admits her love of the handsome hero. The sharp, rasping sounds in the middle of a line in which the villain makes known his black purpose. All annoying and objectionable and easy to avoid if you know how to breathe properly.

Noisy breathing comes from the pressing of too much breath through a narrow passageway with a too explosive motion, causing a sharp intake of breath or a gasp.

If the breath is taken often enough, with proper control, there will be no need for panting and puffing. The tone passageway will be left open to permit the entrance and exit of the tone without any extraneous noise.

EXAMPLE

D'Artagnan's answer to Lady de Winter's question ("The Three Musketeers") as to how he knew she was stopping at the Inn.

Right Way to Breathe

I followed you to the inn. . . . (*Breath*) Suddenly you appeared in the window there. . . . I could not resist you longer. (*Breath*) Risking your disfavor . . . your anger . . . I came. (*Breath*) And with your permission . . . I should like to stay a little. . . .

Wrong Way to Breathe

I followed you to the inn. (*Breath*) Suddenly you appeared in the window there. (*Breath*) I could not resist you longer. (*Breath*) Risking your disfavor, I came (*breath*). And with your permission (*breath*) I should like to stay a little (*breath*).

Rhythmic Speaking

Next to noisy breathing, no habit is more easily acquired than the habit of breathing in jerks in the middle of a sentence and again when the sentence is completed.

EXAMPLE¹

TRIVULZIO: You men of the sword are only too apt to believe that there is no other courage than that which dwells at the end of a blade.

Without correct breath support, the actor will be forced to break this line, although there is no indication by the author that a pause should be made. Without the proper breath support, an actor might read the line in this manner:

You men of the sword are only too apt (*breath*) to believe that there is no other courage (*breath*) than that which dwells at the end of a blade.

Here again the actor is speaking until his breath control is gone and then gasping for breath before he picks up the next line. Emotional upsets, such as fear or anger, have much to do with this kind of jerky breathing. For that reason, the beginner must guard against emotional instability as well as breath instability when he speaks his lines.

Before you start your line, clear up your emotional problems; get a grip on your nerves. Then breathe deeply and regularly until you establish the proper connection between rhythmic speaking and rhythmic breathing.

¹ From "Monna Vanna," by Maurice Maeterlinck. Used by permission of Dodd, Mead & Company, Inc., and George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.

How to Acquire Correct Breathing Habits

Since there can be no reliable breath control unless the other parts of the body are under control, the first step in acquiring correct breathing habits is complete relaxation of the body, correct posture, and proper coordination of the mind, the body, and the voice.

EXERCISES

1. Sit cross-legged on the floor. Rotate the arms slowly, as if circling a large rubber ball, inhaling slowly for four seconds, holding the breath for four seconds, letting the air fill the body. The body rotates slowly, exercising the stomach muscles.

Exercise of these abdominal muscles moves the muscles up and down, thus causing the blood to circulate through all the vital organs encased in the torso.

2. Sit on the floor with the legs extended in front of you and the toes together. Inhale deeply. Bending from the hips until the head reaches the knees, grasp the ankles with both hands. Exhale slowly.

This exercise gives perfect control of the abdominal muscles and aids in the development of diaphragmatic breathing.

3. Stand with the feet slightly apart, the hands resting on the hips. Breathe deeply; then massage the abdominal area by pushing downward with the palm of the hands. Emphasis here is on the abdominal muscles, and the exercise facilitates complete freedom in breathing.

4. Kneeling on both knees, the hands thrust forward loosely in front, sway both back and forth, using the hip line as a pivot in returning to vertical position. This strengthens the thighs and exercises the back muscles and those of the diaphragm.

5. Stand on your toes, raise your hands way above the head, and breathe deeply. Bring your hands down slowly, forming a ball from the waistline as you exhale. Do this exercise before an open window.

6. Sit down on the floor, the legs stretched straight out in front of you. Bend over to touch the tip of your toes, wriggle the tips of your toes, and touch them with the tips of your fingers. Repeat this motion twelve times.

Inhale and Exhale

Now that your body is perfectly poised and your breathing is under control, the next move is a series of exercises to develop greater facility in the use of the breathing muscles.

EXERCISES

1. At the open window, stand straight and relaxed, with the chest high and stationary. Extend the arms out in front. Now take a good deep breath; slowly fill the lungs. Feel your abdomen extend. As you inhale, spread the arms and bring them around parallel with the body, as in swimming. Hold the breath for a few seconds. Feel the diaphragm take hold. Exhale and relax.

Repeat this exercise four times at first. Increase one time each day until you are able to repeat twelve times without tiring. Remember that the diaphragm controls the breath. Keep your mind on the diaphragm muscles.

2. Stand up straight, with the chest high and stationary. Press the fingers on the abdomen. Take a slow, deep breath. Feel your abdomen compress and extend. Hold the breath for eight counts. Bend forward from the waistline with a sharp, quick move and exhale. As you exhale, press the fingers into the abdomen. Relax.

Repeat this exercise four times. Increase one time each day until you can repeat the exercise twelve times without tiring.

3. Press the fingers on the abdomen. Form the lips as though you were about to whistle. Slowly exhale until the abdomen is flat. Press out all the air. Now inhale slowly in the same manner until no more breath can be taken in. Try to make one continuous breath from the exhale to the inhale. This exercise gives your diaphragm a thorough workout.

Repeat four times at first and then increase the number until you are able to repeat the exercise twelve times without tiring.

4. Press the fingers on the abdomen. Form the lips as though you were about to whistle or blow. Slowly exhale until the abdomen feels flat and empty. Then inhale slowly in the same manner. Next, increase the speed of this exercise until you feel the diaphragm vibrating rapidly. It should suggest the feeling and sound of a locomotive picking up steam or of a dog panting after a hard run. Compel your diaphragm to do all the work.

In this final exercise you are giving an imitation of how your breathing apparatus would act after a fast game of tennis. Here you get the same results without the violent exercise. Instead of using your body energy, the exercise will give you a fresh supply.

Practice the entire set of exercises faithfully until you have complete control of your breath. When you are sure of this control, drop Exercises 1, 2 and 3. Continue Exercise 4 daily to maintain good breath control. When your energy is low, this practice will give you a fresh supply. The process is similar to recharging a battery.

I call this vibrational exercise the conditioner. When your nerves are frayed and your digestion unstable, it offers sure relief.

Breathing and Thinking

Read these lines aloud, keeping in mind the idea the author had when he wrote the play.

EXAMPLE¹

DIANE: Stand away . . . I know what I'm talking about. For four years I believed I was married and there was a Bon Dieu protecting me (*she sneers*). Bon Dieu! There's nothing! It's all false! My hope in Chico was false. I pretended this place was Heaven. I clung to that Idea as Chico told me to . . . but it's all collapsed. . . . He's dead. Now when I want your Bon Dieu most he's not here. He does not exist. There's nothing, nothing, nothing!

¹ From "Seventh Heaven," by Austin Strong. Copyright, 1922, by Austin Strong and John Golden. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of Samuel French.

Think in terms of audience response. What kind of people are listening to you? What response do you wish to raise?

As soon as you hit upon the meaning of the line and the reaction you wish to make, stop a moment before you speak. Do you see how naturally and automatically you start to breathe before you speak?

If this automatic breathing doesn't come, start all over again. Think of the idea behind the scene, then the audience reaction, and then wait for the automatic breathing.

This kind of practice will establish the relation between thought and breath, and will enable you to breathe deeply and correctly without practice. Remember: *The rhythm of breathing must correspond to the rhythm of thinking.*

Discovering Your Voice

Have you ever really heard yourself speak?

If not, how are you going to find out whether you have an adequate stage voice?

The surest way is the one all voice coaches are advising before they start a program of work: they make the student talk into a recording machine and then play the record back to him. The big music stores will make a record for from one to three dollars.

The result isn't always pleasant. *There are, so statistics say, only five good natural voices in every hundred.* The others are thin or whining or smothered or, in some cases, even swallowed.

What constitutes a good stage voice?

1. Enough vigor and carrying power to be heard at a reasonable distance.
2. Pleasing pitch.
3. Flexibility—variety of sounds.
4. Well-modulated tone; not harsh, nasal, or flat.
5. Authoritative enough to make an audience respond to any mood or emotion.

Carrying Power

If you know how to use your voice correctly, you can almost whisper and still be heard at a distance.

The first thing a new player at the Municipal Opera Theatre in St. Louis says, on looking from the ninety-foot stage into the auditorium, which seats 10,000 people, is, "My voice will never carry!"

A loud voice doesn't necessarily carry far. A voice that lacks great volume but that takes advantage of the vibrational powers of the head cavities will carry twice as far with less pressure. This vibration is called "edge"; it is the quality that takes the voice of the coloratura singer into the furthestmost nook of the largest auditorium.

With his eye, the actor gauges the amount of voice power he must use to be heard. In a small theater, naturally, he need put very little pressure behind his tones. But the ability to gauge voice power is necessary, since on tour the actor plays in many theaters, some small, some very large. When Katharine Cornell went on tour in repertory, she played one week in a small house and the next in an immense auditorium. "It is next to impossible to stretch modern dialogue to fit the dimensions," mourned Miss Cornell. But she achieved it. Her rich, vibrant, perfectly placed voice contributed just the right amount of power to suit the size of the theater, large or small.

A weak or blurred voice places an added strain on the ears of the listener.

In the starring vehicle of a famous English actor, so popular was the play that it was possible only to buy seats far back in the theater. The actor gave a fine, restrained performance of a clerical character, but in many instances his voice failed to carry. I sat on the edge of my seat, straining every nerve to hear him. I was not only uncomfortable but annoyed. During intermission in the lobby I heard at least a half dozen people say, "I can't hear half that he says."

When an actor inspires that sort of reaction, he is off on the wrong foot. The audience isn't with him, and regardless of how fine a performance he may be giving otherwise, he cannot counteract the first impression.

To give the effect of natural speech and yet to speak out with enough power to carry is one of the new actor's most serious problems.

Pitch

Pitch is the voice level, whether low or high. The length and thickness of the vocal cords and the emotional state of the speaker determine the pitch.

Change of pitch occurs:

1. Within a word (inflection)
2. Between words, thoughts, sentences (change of key indicates change of thought).

EXAMPLE OF INFLECTION WITHIN A WORD

Scene from "Monna Vanna," by Maurice Maeterlinck¹

PRINCIVALLE

Who fired the shot?

VANNA

I know not; the man fled.

PRINCIVALLE

Are you in pain?

VANNA

No.

PRINCIVALLE

Shall I have the wound dressed?

VANNA

No. It is nothing.

PRINCIVALLE

Your mind is made up?

VANNA

Yes.

PRINCIVALLE

Your husband consents?

¹ From "Monna Vanna," by Maurice Maeterlinck. Used by permission of Dodd, Mead & Company, Inc., and George Allen and Unwin, Ltd.

VANNA

Yes.

PRINCIVALLE

There is still time if you wish to renounce . . .

VANNA

No.

PRINCIVALLE

I can conceive that a virtuous woman . . .

VANNA

Yes.

PRINCIVALLE

Who loves her husband . . .

VANNA

Yes.

PRINCIVALLE

Deeply?

VANNA

Yes.

PRINCIVALLE

You are clad only in your mantle?

VANNA

Yes.

PRINCIVALLE

You have seen the chariots and flocks in front of the tent?

VANNA

Yes.

Although Vanna's answers are mostly in monosyllables, the meaning of her thoughts is conveyed entirely through inflection.

EXAMPLE OF CHANGE OF PITCH THROUGH CHANGE OF THOUGHT¹

PELLÉAS: Ah! I breathe at last! I thought, one moment, I was going to be ill in those enormous crypts; I was on the point of falling. . . . There is a damp air there, heavy as a leaden dew, and darkness thick as a poisoned paste. . . . And now, all the air of all the sea! . . . There is a fresh wind, see; fresh as a leaf that has just opened, over the little green waves. . . . Hold! the flowers have just been watered at the foot of the terrace, and the smell of the verdure and the wet roses comes up to us. . . . It must be nearly noon; they are already in the shadow of the tower. . . . It is noon; I hear the bells ringing, and the children are going down to the beach to bathe.

Topping a Scene

When an actor is called upon to "top a speech," he uses a louder and usually a higher vocal pitch than that of the other actors in the scene.

EXAMPLES

To silence a crowd, the actor tops a scene by shouting, "Silence!" or "Stop it!" His voice must be loud enough to be heard above the roar of the crowd.

On the other hand, an actor may top a speech by *emphasis* without raising his voice or using a higher pitch.

DOROTHY: You said we were going to the theater.

BILL: I'm not going.

DOROTHY: But I've bought a new dress. . . . You promised. . . .

BILL: *I said I'm not going . . . and that's final! (emphatically)*

The Speaking Range

Every human being possesses a two-octave speaking range. And yet most of us use only a small part of one octave; the balance of this great speaking force is undeveloped.

¹ From "Pelléas and Mélisande," by Maurice Maeterlinck. Used by permission of Dodd, Mead & Company, Inc., and George Allen and Unwin, Ltd.

Checking the Vocal Range

Practice speaking the word "no" on middle C of the piano. Then take the next half tone. Continue up the scale as high as you can go, still speaking (not singing). When you feel the throat tightening, stop. Never force the voice; it cannot be hurried.

When you have reached the limit of the natural vocal range, take the next half tone, either above or below, and practice very softly. You are stretching the vocal cords, or bands. As the tone is placed, increase the breath volume a little each day.

Although not many singers are gifted with a natural high C or G, by patient practice these tones can be developed. So can the actor with a naturally high-pitched voice develop a fuller range by practicing low notes and the actor with a low-pitched voice round out his range by practicing high notes.

Only when the voice range is fully developed can vocal variety be realized. The more flexible the cords, the wider the range. The actor who speaks in a monotone (or one tone, be it high or low pitch) simply has neglected to develop his range.

The Vocal Cords

The vocal cords are not cords at all. They are the outer edge of two muscles lying horizontally across the windpipe inside the larynx. Fastened in front and loose at the back, they operate very much like a scissors. These cords, which are used constantly, are probably the most delicate muscles of the body. Every time we speak, laugh or cry or make an audible sound, the cords are called upon to function.

Pressure of the breath causes the vocal cords to vibrate. Pitch (high or low) is determined by the frequency with which these vibrations strike the ear.

The frequency with which the cords vibrate depends upon:

1. Length
2. Thickness
3. Tension

The tauter, thinner, or shorter a string is when plucked, the more vibrations it will give off. The same principle applies to the vocal cords. The length and thickness of the cords are a part of the natural equipment, but the tension depends upon the emotional state of the speaker. Anger, excitement, and nervousness tend to tighten the cords. The expression, "a high-strung person," might have been invented to describe a person who acts and speaks at a high tension.

The vocal cords of a man are usually thicker and longer than a woman's and therefore his pitch is lower.

Because women's vocal cords are shorter than men's, their voices are higher in pitch. The voices of children and the very old are light because the breath pressure against the cords is light. A tremolo in the voice is the sign of muscular weakness of the cords. In a singer it shows that the cords have been overstrained. The voice of an old person shakes. So does that of an angry person or one emotionally aroused.

Flexibility

The use of more than one speaking tone calls for flexibility of the vocal cords. This does not necessarily mean that you must have a great range (you may have flexibility with only four or five notes). It means that the voice is capable of rising or falling in intervals or steps.

Flexibility of the cords helps:

1. *Inflection* (change of pitch within words and between words, phrases, sentences, and thoughts).
2. *Modulation* (crescendo and diminuendo of a single tone).

Inflection

Just as there is a word vocabulary, so there is a vocal, or sound, vocabulary. An interesting, forceful speaker has at his command a selection of rich, illustrative sounds, the product of pitch, emphasis, light and shading. As no orator would think of confining himself to a few words, neither should an actor rely on a few tones.

And, in turn, variety of inflection depends upon the flexibility of the vocal cords.

Inflection is the change of pitch within a word to indicate thought. The same word used in a different manner may express any number of thoughts.

Inflection is the stressing of one syllable and the slighting of another.

For instance, if you were listening in on a voice lesson, you might see a young woman lifting her arms to an imaginary lover and saying, "Two . . . four . . . six . . . eight . . . ten."

The idea is that her inflection is so perfect that the audience will be able to decode these strange numbers and know that the girl means: "Darling, I love you."

Another time she might say, "eight . . . seven . . . six . . . five . . . four . . . three . . . two . . . one," and you would know from her inflection that she meant: "Go! Never darken these doors again!"

There are three kinds of inflection:

1. Rising, which usually denotes suspended thought; a questioning attitude. The rising inflection is an unfinished sound.

2. Falling, which is positive and decisive. The falling inflection is a finished sound.

3. Circumflex, which is a combination of both rising and falling. The falling inflection is a curved sound. It may convey evasion, consideration, reflection, doubt, sarcasm.

EXAMPLES

1. *Rising*

"I heard a very interesting story about how the play came to be written."

"Yes?"

2. *Falling*

"Were you glad when the play was over?"

"Yes."

3. *Circumflex: Rise and Fall*

"Did you like the star of the play?"

"Ye-e-ss [with reservations]."

Tone

The quality of the voice depends upon the tone. The tone, regardless of natural pitch (high or low), may still be monotonously flat, thin and twangy, deep and hollow, or breathy. (Most athletes have a breathy quality.)

The voice has five tones:

1. *Orotund* (rich, full resonant tone).—Used in making speeches or to express sentiment or emotions.
2. *Pectoral* (low-pitched, hollow sound from the chest). Used to express supernatural or eerie.
3. *Aspirate* (breathy speech—more breath than sound). Used in whispers, panting excitement.
4. *Guttural* (throaty, hard, rasping sound, made by tight throat muscles). Used to express anger, threat.
5. *Oral*. Natural tone of speaking.

EXAMPLES

1. *Orotund Tone*—"Monna Vanna"¹

GUIDO: (*To his people*) Ah, you, my brothers, to whom he caused so much suffering; you whom he sought to massacre, whose wives and children he sold into slavery, look at him now!

2. *Pectoral Tone*—"Everyman"

EVERYMAN: What desireth God of me?

DEATH: That shall I show thee; a reckoning He will needs have without any longer respite.

3. *Aspirate Tone*

Sh!! . . . Don't even breathe. . . . They will hear. . . !

¹ From "Monna Vanna," by Maurice Maeterlinck. Used by permission of Dodd, Mead & Company, Inc., and George Allen and Unwin, Ltd.

4. *Guttural Tone*—"Dead End"¹

TOMMY: Yuh'll git it, yuh stool pigeon! Ah'll give yuh sump'n yuh won't fuhgit so easy.

5. *Oral Tone*—"Victoria Regina"²

VICTORIA: In my position, it is I who have to say it . . . unfortunately. Ordinarily it is not what a woman would wish to say herself. She would rather . . . he said it.

The Building of a Tone

The tone begins with the thought we wish to express. Then we take a breath (diaphragm). The breath passes into the lungs, through the throat, touches the cords that vibrate, changing the breath into sound. The sound, aided by the resonance chambers of the head, passes into the mouth and is formed into a word by the lips, teeth, and tongue. Tone is always limited by the breath capacity, or energy. Never force a loud tone by calling upon the outer muscles of the throat for help.

Nasal Tone

A nasal tone, often referred to as "talking through the nose," is really just the opposite. Instead of talking through the nose (using the nasal passages for resonance), the actor is talking from the throat.

Nasal tone is caused by the habitual depression of the soft palate and the tightening of the throat and tongue muscles. The soft palate is the fleshy curtain attached to the hard palate, or roof of the mouth. Normally, it hangs relaxed. During speech, except in the use of the letters *n* and *m*, it is drawn up and back.

(Note the difference between a nasal tone and a head tone, which uses the nasal passages for resonance. Resonance depends on freedom from all restriction in the throat and nasal passages.)

To test yourself for nasal tones, hold the nose and recite the alphabet. If you speak correctly, *n* and *m* will be the only letters

¹"Dead End," by Sidney Kingsley, Random House, Inc.

²"Victoria Regina," by Laurence Housman, Charles Scribner's Sons.

that will sound differently when the nose is shut than when it is free.

To cure this unpleasant nasal tone, the palate must be relaxed. In order to check the position of the palate, look in the mirror and, with tongue flat on the mouth, hum, "Ah." See how the soft palate raises. Hum, "Ah," again; hold it; then relax. Continue these two movements until the soft palate is flexible instead of rigidly depressed.

When you hum, keep your tongue and the adjoining throat muscles relaxed. Never arch the tongue or contract the throat muscles. Hum softly.

EXERCISE

Practice holding your nostrils while you say, "Jersey cows browse placidly all day."

Keep this up until you can make the sentence sound equally musical with or without the nose held.

Modulation of a Tone

The modulation of a tone is the conscious control of a sound to affect the emotions of the listener as well as to express the feelings of the speaker. A change in emotion influences the modulation or coloring of a word, and a change of thought influences the inflection.

Modulation concerns the degree of breath power placed against the vocal cords. By use of the breath, resonance, and timing, a single tone may be modulated.

We modulate:

1. Pitch (whisper, scream, murmur, shout)
2. Tone: by

- a. Degree of volume (swelling or diminishing)
- b. Tempo (the length of the word in relation to other words, or the length of a syllable in relation to other syllables)

There are three degrees of modulation in a tone: cold, warm, fiery.

1. Cold (mental). This modulation is usually a monotone, uncolored by emotion. It has an intellectual ring and might be used by a lecturer, public speaker, or someone reciting statistics.

2. Warm (emotive). This tone, which is warm and rich, springs from the emotions. It appeals to the audience's mind through their hearts.

3. Fiery (vital). This tone carries the ring of vitality, power, energy. It is the tone used in the old-fashioned declamatory school of acting and is likely to sound false or insincere if not tempered by the mental and emotive powers. Used by the leader of a mob, carried away by passion, it would incite men to action.

EXAMPLES IN PITCH MODULATION

1. Sh! I hear someone coming [whisper]!
2. Help! Help! We're sinking [scream].
3. How gentle and tranquil the valley is tonight [murmur].
4. Hey—there! We're calling you [shout].

EXAMPLES IN TONE MODULATION

1. *Volume*

The sun, warm and *vibrant*, *dazzled* us. (The breath volume is stressed upon the first syllables, but the tone remains the same.)

2. *Tempo*

The sun *shining* on the sea *dazzled* us. (The first syllables are held longer than the last.)

STUDY IN TONE MODULATION

"MEETING AT NIGHT," BY ROBERT BROWNING

The gray sea and the long black land;
And the yellow half-moon large and low;
And the startled little waves that leap
In fiery ringlets from their sleep,

As I gain the cove with pushing prow,
As I quench its speed i' the slushy sand.

Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach;
Three fields to cross till a farm appears;
A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch
And blue spurt of a lighted match,
And a voice less loud, through its joys and fears,
Than the two hearts beating each to each!

"CHORUS FROM ATALANTA," BY ALGERNON SWINBURNE

The full streams feed on flower or rushes,
Ripe grasses trammel a travelling foot,
The faint fresh flame of the young year flushes
From leaf to flower and flower to fruit;
And fruit and leaf are as gold and fire,
And the oat is heard above the lyre,
And the hooped heel of a satyr crushes
The chestnut-husk at the chestnut-root.

And Pan by noon and Bacchus by night,
Fleeter of foot than the fleet-foot kid,
Follows with dancing and fills with delight
The Maenad and the Bassarid;
And soft as lips that laugh and hide
The laughing leaves of the trees divide,
And screen from seeing and leave in sight
The God pursuing, the maiden hid.

Study these lines and see how the meaning of each word deserves a different treatment. The words "quick sharp scratch" have different tones and meter than the words "laughing leaves." The words "warm sea-scented beach" are entirely different in tempo and volume from the words "fleeter of foot."

The Development of Cadence

Cadence is the rhythmic movement of speech, or its modulating tones. Reading aloud poetry that has a definite meter is good practice for developing cadence.

Stand in a corner facing the wall (for a sounding board) and repeat with feeling the Browning and Swinburne poems.

The walls throw back your voice and let you hear it somewhat as others do.

Reading a foreign language aloud is also helpful in developing cadence and tone.

Katharine Cornell makes it a habit to read French books aloud to herself before a performance. The French language lends itself to vigorous use of the mouth. The Italian language exercises the vowel sounds.

Voice Authority

Every emotion known to man can be expressed through the voice. A character in a wheel chair can dominate a scene without moving a muscle, so long as he has the power of speech. I am thinking of the invalid, played by Frank Conroy, in "The Little Foxes," by Lillian Hellman. In the most dramatic scene of the play, Conroy, a helpless invalid, relies on his voice to call for help, to plead with his wife to save his life, to whimper his dying prayers.

A scene can be played in the dark with consummate artistry, depending entirely on the voice.

In "I Married an Angel," one such scene was played in the dark. A surprise party was staged at the home of the leading character, played by Dennis King. Just before his entrance the stage was darkened. The young man entered, calling his valet, who asked his master if he would like to invite in some friends. The man said, no. All his friends were blockheads. He started to undress for bed. When he asked his valet to help him remove his trousers, the lights came up, revealing, to his amazement, a room full of laughing people.

Strength, pitch, modulation, and authority—those are the four requirements for a good stage voice. Now let us analyze your voice to discover the handicaps, if any, that must be overcome before you can hope to use your voice effectively across the footlights.

EXAMPLE

First, here is the pronunciation test, a simple little story that on first reading seems nothing more than a childish account of the adventures of a young rat.

"Arthur the Rat"

Once there was a young rat, named Arthur, who never could make up his mind. Whenever his friends asked him if he would like to go out with them, he would only answer, "I don't know." He wouldn't say "yes" or "no" either. He would always shirk making a choice.

His Aunt Helen said to him: "Now look here! No one is going to care for you if you carry on like this. You have no more mind than a blade of grass."

One rainy day, the rats heard a great noise in the loft. The pine rafters were all rotten, so that the barn was rather unsafe. At last one of the joists gave way and fell to the ground. The walls shook, and all the rats' hair stood on end with fear and horror. "This won't do," said the captain. "I'll send out scouts to search for a new home."

Within five hours the ten scouts came back. They said, "We found a stone house where there is room and board for us all. There is a kindly horse named Nelly, a cow, a calf, and a garden with an elm tree." The rats first crawled out of their little houses and then stood on the floor in a long line. Just then the old rat saw Arthur. "Stop," he ordered coarsely. "You are coming, of course?" "I'm not certain," said Arthur, undaunted, "because the roof may not come down yet. Those beams look very strong to me." "Well," said the angry old rat, "we can't wait for you to join us. Right about face! March!"

Arthur stood and watched them hurry away. "I think I'll go tomorrow," he calmly said to himself, "but then again, I don't know; it's so nice and snug here. I'm sure these walls are safe."

That night there was a big crash. In the foggy morning, some men—with some boys and girls—rode up and looked at the barn. When one of them moved a board, he saw a young rat, quite dead, half in and half out of his hole. Thus the shirker got his due.

Actually, this brief story contains almost all the sounds in the English language, together with some excellent combinations.

For instance, "No one is going to care for you if you carry on like this."

Study the sentence, "He would always shirk making a choice."

Strength: "'Well,' said the angry old rat, 'we can't wait for you to join us. Right about face! March!'" "

Pitch: "His Aunt Helen said to him: 'Now look here!'" "

Modulation: "'I think I'll go tomorrow,' he calmly said to himself."

Authority: "'Stop!' he ordered coarsely. 'You are coming, of course?'" "

The Voice—the Instrument of the Emotions

Listen to a group of people talking in a room together. The various voices differ as to pitch and intonation. As each person contributes a new thought, the pitch changes. One voice is thin, high, quick, staccato. Another is low, rich, slow in response. Someone laughs. There is a pause—and pause is really vocal punctuation. Perhaps two people speak at once; they apologize; there is another pause; and then the conversation is resumed.

As in real life, so on the stage, except that behind the footlights you are one of the players instead of an observer of the real life scene. You are speaking the lines that someone else has conceived; therefore you must be prepared with a technique to interpret them.

When cultivated people get together for conversation, they do not blurt out all their thoughts in one breath. They break up their sentences; they pause; they choose their words. So when an actor finds in his script the stage direction (*Pause*), he is doing nothing more than following the habits of his daily life off stage.

If this variety of vocal response does not come naturally, then it must be artificially stimulated.

For instance, suppose an actor in excellent health and spirits is cast to play a mean dyspeptic. Not only must his imagination build the external character by costume, make-up, and action, but he must create a voice to match it.

The vocal timbre of a sick person is whiny and petulant. The tempo of his sentences is sharp and impatient. He is speaking with

effort. Life is unpleasant, and he shows it not only in his facial expression and actions but in his voice pitch and rhythm of speaking.

Voice and mood always blend. A trained actor would no more shout a love scene than he would raise his voice in a peal of laughter at the sight of someone being hurt.

The human voice responds naturally to mood. When we are not feeling well our voices drop. The tones are dull and lagging. When we are in good health our voices are bright and quick in timbre, and we become stimulated when we speak.

A nervous, highly energetic person rarely speaks slowly or on an even pitch. On the other hand, a phlegmatic person seldom speaks in a rapid staccato fashion.

The experienced player holds you with an easy flow of language. There is a variety of musical tone and inflection in his voice as it rises and falls in perfect rhythm. These effects don't come by mere chance. They are the result of careful study.

The Voice—a Stage Mechanic

There are certain technical principles of stage speech that the beginner must absorb before he can hope to project his voice across the footlights.

If, by a sharp inflection, he can get an effect out of a line that brings applause from the audience, he must first learn how to get the effect and then how to repeat it, night after night. Voice production, correct intonation and inflection are technical matters that *can* and *must* be learned.

By following these exercises, the actor will develop the right use of his vocal cords until he is able to use them in a natural, effortless manner. The combined set of exercises will place the voice and bring out the timbre he needs for continued hard work. Once placed, he will be able to stand the terrific strain the player's voice is under at all times.

Practice these exercises softly. No power or pressure should be used. Feel the vibration in the upper part of your nose and head. The vibration will increase naturally as you continue the exercise.

The first exercise concerns the natural sounding board in the head. This sounding board is located in the small bony cavities around the nose and forehead. We use these cavities for additional vibration to give edge and carrying power to the tone. At the same time, the exercise relieves the pressure on the vocal cords and throat muscles.

A soft preliminary hum places the tone in the front head cavities. This is the tone finder. By joining the vowel sounds to the hum, the tone is placed properly. There should be no break in the voice as the hum is combined with the vowel sounds. Practice softly the following exercises.

EXERCISES

1. With the lips closed, the throat relaxed, hum softly; then open the mouth and join with na-nay-nee.

With the lips closed, the throat relaxed, hum softly; then open the mouth and join with ma-may-mee.

Practice slowly the above exercises in the natural tone of the speaking voice. As you become familiar with them, go up four tones on the scale in half-tone intervals and then down.

2. With the lips closed, hum softly. Open the mouth and join the hum with na-nay-nee-ma-may-mee in one continuous sound. Always *think* the tones up in the head. As you become familiar with them go up four tones on the scale in half-tone intervals and then down again.

3. Continue with Exercise 2 and go up the scale in half-tone intervals and descend the same way. This should be a complete octave.

4. Repeat the vowels *a-e-i-o-u* separately and distinctly. Open the mouth naturally. Try to place the tone in the same location as in the previous exercises. You are seeking vibration "edge" on the tones, not volume.

5. Join the vowels *a-e-i-o-u* into one continuous sound, all on the same note. The lips and the mouth form the sound. There is no break.

6. Join the vowels into one continuous sound and go up the scale in half-tone intervals. Descend the same way. Complete the vowels *a-e-i-o-u* on each note.

7. Join Exercises 2 and 4 into one continuous sound. Hum *na-nay-nee-ma-may-mee-a-e-i-o-u*. All these sounds should be placed in the same location in the head.

8. Repeat Exercise 7 and go up the scale in half-tone intervals and descend the same way. Complete the exercise on each note of the scale.

9. As you become proficient in the exercises, alternate with the following exercise, which will help the articulation and give flexibility. Use it up and down the scale. You will notice it uses one interval more than a complete scale, as in: *do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti-do-re-do-ti-la-sol-fa-mi-re-do*. Practice the exercise slowly at first. Then increase in speed until you are able to repeat five or six times without stopping. There is no break; all is done in perfect rhythm.

Practice these exercises night and morning. When you feel tired, stop. The humming should be done softly, with the throat relaxed. Let the tones in the voice develop naturally. Don't use force. The tones must grow, and soon you will feel this growth. The additional vibrations give the voice edge and carrying power.

In all these exercises, your voice must have the support of the diaphragm.

Modern playwriting does not demand the vigorous vocal technique of barnstorming days in the theater. Dramatic denouements and long speeches are a thing of the past. Today's young player does not develop his voice in the same manner as did his predecessors, since the present method of speaking dialogue calls only for simplicity and naturalness.

"Don't act," the player of today is told. As a consequence, in his effort to mirror naturalism, he underplays and gives a negative performance. It is vitally important that the audience hear what the actor has to say. If he were to use the manner of speech of everyday social conversation (which is natural), he would not be heard past the first row.



In "Reunion in Vienna," by Robert E. Sherwood, Alfred Lunt as the gay, dashing Archduke discusses his former sweetheart, Elena (Lynn Fontanne), with her unromantic doctor husband (Minor Watson).

Shouting will not solve his voice problem. The solution lies in cultivating the voice, in developing head vibrations to make the voice sound carry—not in an old-fashioned voice development but in the simple, modern way of projecting the voice so that it will be natural, audible, and clear.

Better Be Yourself

When you start to train your voice, listen to the tones and voice mannerisms of the great folk of the stage, but don't imitate. Your best efforts may still fall far short of Ethel Barrymore, but your

trained voice will be your own, as much a part of you as your head and shoulders and much more interpretive of your personality.

A long time ago Marc Connelly heard a girl speak a small part in a play. He listened to her intonation, soft and rich and a little husky, and to her laugh—a sound of pure delight.

Because of her voice, individual and interesting and expressive of her personality, Mr. Connelly gave the girl the lead in "Dulcy." She was Lynn Fontanne.

So speak in a way that will express the kind of person you are. Stage directors agree that even a harsh voice is better than an artificial one.

Diction

IT seems to me that the word “diction” has been mauled about too much of late. Too many of the voice coaches, even those who call themselves “tone technicians,” are apt to confuse diction with voice cultivation—pitch, tone, and volume.

Others, especially those trained in the Little Red Schoolhouse, think of diction in terms of elocution, of Cousin Emily on the school platform reciting “Boots” with appropriate gestures.

Actually, diction isn’t voice culture at all; neither is it elocution. Diction is the most precise of all the stage mechanics that have to do with speech.

Diction can be defined simply as:

The physical means whereby a word (a symbol to signify an idea or thought) is carried over to the listener by the use of lips, tongue, teeth, and jaw.

The mouth is the gateway to sound, and, like a gate, when it is in use it should be kept open wide enough to function properly.

The jaw muscles are hinges that, in speech, should be well oiled, or flexible, and under control of the speaker.

The teeth are fences, over (and through) which the breath is forced into sounds.

The tongue is the valve that controls the projection of sound.

The lips are the arches through which sound, now formed into words, is projected.

Correct diction is the art of speaking words so that the jaw, teeth, lips, and tongue shall assume the right relation one to another and, so related, best suggest the thought of which the word is the symbol.

I have said that the jaw (hinges) must be flexible. How to relax the jaw, then, shall be our first point of attack.

EXERCISES

1. Yawn slowly. Close the eyes and feel how the deep breath with which the yawn begins relaxes all the muscles of the jaw.

Just before the yawn breaks, stop, and, instead of yawning, speak. Say ahhhhhhhh. Draw it out. Repeat this ten times. Keep at it.

Then yawn again, stop the yawn, and speak. Take full-voweled monosyllables: won or floor or go or stop or love.

2. Drop the head forward, resting the chin on the chest. Raise the head, keeping the chin down. Let the mouth fall open.

Place the fingers on either side of the head where the jaws join and open the mouth quickly.

Now let the mouth fall open in passive surrender. This will completely relax the jaw and permit the perfectly modeled and toned word to leave the mouth.

So much for relaxing the tension of the jaw. Fifteen minutes a day, please, of actual practice, with the constant thought of complete passivity of the jaw muscles, will give you the flexibility you need.

The Tongue

The tongue, the valve of speech, plays a vital part in the presentation of words. It is a free agent in the modeling of the perfect word. It also holds the sound in check until time for its projection. Its action must be agile and spontaneous. The tongue is a bundle of muscles. The tip is more easily controlled than the back.

EXERCISES FOR THE TONGUE

1. Open the mouth wide. Place the tip of the tongue against the upper teeth ridge. Let it fall flat to the floor of the mouth. Speed up the action.

2. Open the mouth wide. Extend the tongue. Move it rapidly from side to side.

3. Groove the tongue, first by placing the tip against the upper teeth ridge, then reversing, arching the tongue and placing the tip against the lower teeth ridge.

4. Combine *l* (the most important consonant in so far as the tongue is concerned) with *a*, and repeat the syllable *la* with increasing speed to form these groups: *lá . . . lá lá lá . . . lá lá lá . . . lá . . . lá*.

5. Change the accent over the vowel and repeat the exercise until all the sounds of *a* are exhausted in combination with *l*.

6. Change the vowel and repeat the exercise until all the vowels have been used in combination with *l*.

7. Change the consonant to *d*, then to *t*, then to *n*, and repeat the exercise.

8. Follow these exercises on groups of syllables with work on groups of words of one syllable, beginning with *l*, such as *late*, *lake*, *lane*, *lame*; *last*, *lack*, *lank*, *lapse*, *laugh*; *lean*, *least*, *leak*, *leap*, *lead*.

The Lips in Speech

All word patterns form in the mouth and are controlled by the position of the tongue and the lips. On some letters the lips come together; on others, the lower lip presses against the upper teeth; and on still others, the lips are rounded.

Take the words easily on the lips and let them flow. If you think of sound beginning in the diaphragm and forming on the lips, you will keep the throat free of tension. By the time the words have reached the lips (through the jaw, the teeth, and the tongue) they are molded. The job of the lips is to eject the words beautifully.

EXERCISE

Combine the letter *m* with the vowel *e*, and let the tone flow easily on the lips in the repeated syllable *me-me-me*.

With the same easy gesture of the lips, let out these words: meal, meek, mean, mound, mere, mill, mighty, make.

Don't Be Afraid to Open Your Mouth

A well-known star, identified with subtle drawing-room-comedy parts, puts over his comedy by affecting a dead pan expression. I have never seen one of his performances without thinking: "For heaven's sake, why doesn't he open his mouth and speak up!" Yet, his particular brand of comedy is distinguished by that very dead pan look and by vague, mumbling delivery of lines.

I have yet to see the man laugh out loud or speak clearly. His words seem to escape in spite of him, not because of his will. It may be that he has some vocal impediment, which for fifteen years or more he has been able to conceal.

In other words, the actor may have adapted his acting technique to his impediment, instead of overcoming his handicap to increase his acting ability. His acting is otherwise flawless; the handling of his body without fault. Smooth, subtle, sly are some of the words used to describe his work. He has never, however, been awarded a medal for good diction.

It is not possible to project lines clearly and effectively when the face, jaw, and lips remain tense and expressionless. Don't be afraid to open your mouth!

Words

The spoken word is the physical or outward expression of a thought. *Words in themselves have no real value. It is the thoughts that radiate through that give them meaning and direction.* To the unimaginative, words mean only the letters that compose them.

Most people depend entirely on their words to convey their meanings. It does not occur to them that their speech must be controlled in accordance with the sense of what they are saying.

The secret of good diction, on the stage or off:

1. *Keep in mind the meaning of the word you are speaking.*

2. *Make your voice emphasis match the emphasis of your words.*

3. *Pronounce the word accurately.*

Develop a curiosity about words. When you hear a new one, look up the pronunciation in the dictionary. Find out what the word means and then think what it means to you. When you use the word, picture it emotionally before you express it physically.

LIST OF WORDS TO PRACTICE

| | | |
|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| precedents | psychological | posterity |
| mischievous | kaleidoscopic | monologue |
| amanuensis | liniment | irrelevant |
| memorandum | synopsis | dissonant |
| metamorphosis | precedence | unostentatious |
| manifestation | climactic | punctual |
| antithesis | immigration | pulchritude |
| laboratory | commensurate | avoirdufois |
| formidable | poignant | facetious |
| pronunciation | extricate | experiment |
| vicissitudes | prognosticate | boomerang |
| recuperate | perspicuity | aggrandizement |
| appreciative | Orpheus and | ameliorate |
| chicanery | Eurydice | jeopardize |
| argumentative | Aristophanes | daguerreotype |
| argument | gluttonous | regularly |
| accompanist | veracious | italics |
| commendatory | voracious | pumpkin |
| pseudonym | connective | premature |
| deterioration | antecedent | ingenuous |
| sacrilegious | veterinary | alumni |
| technique | auxiliaries | attacked |
| idiosyncrasy | perennial | indicative |
| simultaneous | commiserate | participle |
| magnanimous | autobiography | |
| lithographer | reincarnation | |

Socrates said, "Never use a word without seeing in nature that for which the word stands."

Word Selection

Words provide the link of communication between men. They interpret the emotions: love, hate, joy, fear. They inspire man with hope. They indicate character, for they can brand a man as dishonest as well as establish him as great. Words contribute action, sound, and color to a sentence.

EXAMPLE¹

Marco, Monna Vanna's father-in-law, speaks as she returns from Princiville's tent.

MARCO: *Hark, how they shout! . . . The whole palace trembles; the flowers fall from the vases onto the steps. . . . The very flagstones seem to be rising beneath us to sweep us along in this overpowering gladness. . . . Ah, I begin to see. . . . They are close to the gates! The crowd divides. . . .*

Words are made up of vowels and consonants. Vowel sounds are like flesh and blood to a word. They give life, richness, and color. They may be warm and sensuous or soft and musical.

The consonants are the bones of a word. They contribute structure and form, power and strength.

The vowels are *a, e, i, o, u*. There are also vowel sounds known as diphthongs—such as *eu*, as in *new*, *oi*, as in *boy*, *ai*, as in *my*. All vowels are sounded.

Consonants are divided into two classes: fricatives, which means breathed or unvoiced consonants, and voiced consonants.

The fricatives are *h, p, f, t, k, w, s*.

The voiced consonants are *b, d, z, g, m, n, l, j, ng, r, v*.

The vowels have three positions in the mouth, and each position depends upon the position of the tongue. The tongue is a bundle of muscles. The tip is more easily controlled than the back. The three vowel sounds are FRONT VOWEL, MID-VOWEL, and BACK VOWEL.

¹ From "Monna Vanna," by Maurice Maeterlinck. Used by permission of Dodd, Mead & Company, Inc., and George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.

Front Vowels

E (long, as in *me*), *i* (short, as in *is*), *e* (short, as in *let*), *ē* (short, as in *where*), *a* (as in *at*), diphthong *ai* (as in *my*).

In sounding the FRONT VOWELS, the back of the tongue is held high in the mouth close to the hard palate; the tip rests against the lower teeth ridge.

With your mirror, practice these words with front vowel sounds: aim, my, mean, seem, keen, late, ache, ail, meal, feel, steal, lie, fill, belt, felt, friend, hand, band, matter.

Repeat these sentences with the thought always of putting the vowel forward:

My friend danced easily and well.

It feels like rain.

Mid-vowels

The mid-vowels are *i* (as in *girl*), *a* (as in *alone*), *o* (as in *love*). In making the mid-vowels, the tongue should be as relaxed as possible, the tip lightly touching the lower teeth ridge. The soft palate raised and the vocal cords in vibration. While the tongue is relaxed, open the mouth and make a soft vocal sound. It will sound like *uh*, or something like a grunt. This is called a neutral or indefinite sound.

Words with mid-vowels to practice with your mirror: girl, glove, bird, cult, dirt, flirt, curve, above, alert, muff, cuff, curl.

The girl dropped her glove in the dirt.

The alert bird gets the worm.

Back Vowels

The back vowels are *u* (as in *who*), *u* (as in *could*), *o* (as in *blow*), *a* (as in *water*), *o* (as in *on*), *a* (as in *father*).

In making the back vowel sound, the back of the tongue is raised high in the mouth with the tip lightly touching the lower teeth ridge.

Words to practice with your mirror: moon, plume, loom, roof, would, room, smooth, pool, school, fool, bloom, flute, cool, glue, blow, float, clue.

The moon on the schoolroom roof.

The fruit of the loom is smooth.

Always use your mirror in practicing these vowel sounds so that you may become familiar with them and their positions in your mouth.

| | | | |
|-----|--------------|------------|--------------|
| | <i>Front</i> | <i>Mid</i> | <i>Back</i> |
| Say | <i>a</i> | <i>uh</i> | <i>oo</i> |
| | <i>Back</i> | <i>Mid</i> | <i>Front</i> |
| | <i>oo</i> | <i>uh</i> | <i>a</i> |

May loves you. You love May.

Diphthong Vowels

A diphthong is the combination or blending of two vowel sounds.

Long *a*, as in *make*, is the combination of short *e*, as in *get*, plus short *i*, as in *pin*, or *ei*.

Short *e*, as in *prey*, is the combination of *e*, as in *met*, plus short *i*, as in *pin*, or *ei*.

Long *i* sound, as in *isle*, is the combination of *a*, as in *father*, plus short *i*, as in *pin*, or *ai*.

y sound, as in *my*, is the combination of *a*, as in *father*, plus short *i*, as in *pin*, or *ai*.

Long *o* sound, as in *oar*, is the combination of *o*, as in *obey*, plus *oo*, as in *spool*, or *ou*.

oi or *oy* sound, as in *boy* or *oil*, is the combination of *a*, as in *awful*, plus short *i*, as in *pin*, or *awi*.

Consonants

Next to the vowels, the nasal consonants, *n*, *m*, and *ng* have the most resonant sound. When properly made, they have a sustained, musical quality. In making these sounds, the throat should be free and the soft palate relaxed. Combine the *m* and

n with front vowel sounds to get the tone forward: nail, Ned, net, nigh, might, knee, Neal, neck, mail, my, met, me, meal, mine.

Always give full value to the ending, *ng*. Singing, bringing, changing, playing, ring, king, bang, rang, fling, shining, humming, dancing. The effect should be almost like a humming sound.

To gain freedom from throat constriction and control of breath, practice the LABIODENTALS, *f* and *v*. Labiodental really means with the lip against the teeth, and in this case it is the lower one that works. The breath pressing against the upper teeth ridge past the lower lip brings the tone forward.

The *f* is a light and delicate sound, whereas the *v*, if sustained, has a musical quality.

Practice these words before the mirror: fifth, favorite, muffin, affable, fox, shuffle, baffle, offer, cuff, ruffle, muffle, calf, shovel, rival, savor, carve, very, loved, shelved, cover, leave, drivel, vow.

The postdentals, *r* and *l*, give a legato effect that can be beautiful if pronounced correctly. In forming the *l* sound, the tip of the tongue touches the front upper teeth ridge, the breath passes on either side of the slightly upraised tongue. Be careful not to say *el*.

The *l* sound has two principal forms: CLEAR and DARK.

The clear *l* occurs initially or after initial consonant, as in *little* or *glide*.

The dark *l* is used finally, as in *pull*, or before the final consonant, as in *bold*.

In pronouncing both the clear *l* and the dark *l*, the tip of the tongue is pressed against the upper teeth ridge. Only the back of the tongue changes position.

In using the clear *l*, the back of the tongue curves downward.

Examples of clear l: lady, let, lake, slide, lilt, ply, climb, fly, link, blight, flight.

In forming the dark *l*, the back of the tongue is raised toward the soft palate. Care must be taken not to add another vowel sound in going from the preceding vowel sound to the consonant. Do not say *bo-a-ld*.

Examples of dark l: Pull, all, ball, lull, bold, fold, molt, malt, fault, scald.

There is also an INVERTED *l*, which is formed with the tip of the tongue turned inward toward the soft palate. In forming this retroflex or inverted *l*, there is danger of constricting the throat and thus producing a nasal sound.

Examples of inverted l: stifled, bottle, single, battle, cattle, bangle.

Repeat these sentences: The lonely lady loved the lilies. Linger a little longer.

The letter *r*, like *l*, has a legato quality and should always be formed forward in the mouth. In forming the *r*, the underside of the tip of the tongue should be near enough to the lower teeth ridge so that the escaping air produces a slight murmur. The rest of the tongue should be relaxed. Watch that the *r* is not back in the throat and that the throat muscles are relaxed; otherwise the tone will become guttural or inverted.

Practice these words: glorious, rarely, ring, rich, mirror, marry, fairly, barricade, paradise, paramount, caring, starry, parent.

Practice speaking the bilabial consonants, *w* and *wh*, to develop a forward tone. When the lips are well rounded, the tone will come forward automatically.

Practice the following words before a mirror: why, whither, whirr, war, wow, whoa, whale, quick, queer, where, whip, white, whisper. The effect is that of a slight whistle through rounded lips. It is controlled by the diaphragm.

Dental Sibilants and Affricates

A fricative consonant sound is produced by friction of breath through a narrow aperture. *P*, *b*, *t*, *k* are fricatives, sometimes also called plosives.

A sibilant or spirant is *s* or *z*.

An affricate is a combination of a fricative, such as *k*, *t*, *p*, *b*, with a breathed consonant, as *h*, *f*, *t*, *th*, or a spirant, as *z* or *s*.

Examples: widths, fourteenths, sixth, tacks, snacks, knocks, bricks, sinks, books, bobs, nuts, beats, stoops, loops, fifths, tasks, tastes, frosts, tracks.

In forming the sibilants and affricates, the tongue should not remain flat in the mouth, nor should it protrude between the teeth. There should be a narrow groove on either side of the tongue so that a thin stream of air, controlled by the diaphragm, can pass.

Don't prolong these sounds. Make them clear, distinct, and brief. In radio or microphone work the sibilants should be particularly watched. Otherwise there is an unpleasant hissing sound.

The dental consonants, or the *th* sound, are a difficult combination, too often slighted. The tip of the tongue touches the upper ridges of the teeth, and the air escapes on either side of the tongue.

Particular attention should be paid to the dental endings, as in: twelfth, mouth, fourth, heath, sheath, wreath, breath, health, earth, birth, ninth. Be careful in giving these endings full value not to add a vowel sound, as *fourth-a*, or *twelfth-a*.

A word can be broken down and analyzed to find its meaning and inflection just as a word can be analyzed to find its relationship to the rest of a sentence.

For instance, in saying the word "ring," the first two letters, *ri*, are subordinated to the *ng* sound, which gives it meaning and carrying power. In the word "smooth," the back vowel *oo* sound gives the word meaning. An understanding of these word sounds will greatly improve your diction.

Always be sure your vowels produce clear sounds. Say *o*, not *oah*.

Avoid adding diphthong sounds, such as *fee-ul* for *feel*, *re-ul* for *real*.

THE ALPHABET WIRED FOR SOUND

- a* (ah) back vowel
- b* bilabial (breath emitted between lips)
- c* sibilant *s* (and front vowel, *e*)

| | |
|---|--|
| d | dental consonant, tongue against upper teeth ridge |
| e | front vowel |
| f | fricative consonant (breathed) |
| g | nasal consonant |
| h | breathed consonant (sometimes called voiceless vowel) |
| i | pronounced short (mid-vowel), pronounced long (ai) (front vowel) |
| j | nasal consonant g combined with long a |
| k | fricative breathed consonant |
| l | postdental |
| m | nasal consonant |
| n | nasal consonant |
| o | back vowel |
| p | breathed (fricative) consonant |
| q | combination fricative k sound and eu diphthong |
| r | lateral consonant |
| s | sibilant |
| t | fricative (breathed consonant) |
| u | back vowel |
| v | labial consonant |
| w | labial consonant (fricative) |
| x | combination front vowel e . . . fricative k . . . sibilant s |
| y | diphthong oo plus long i |
| z | sibilant |

Where Are You From, Stranger?

One needn't travel abroad to fill his ears with strange accents. Almost any section of the United States has some distinguishing quality of speech that sets it apart from its neighbor. The Westerner flattens his *a* and sounds his *r* harshly; his is a flat voice. But listen to your New England friends sometimes or even to the velvet-voiced Southerner, and you will hear a speech as flat as a wind-swept desert.

The dry-spoken Yankee from down east has tight jaw muscles, they say, whereas those of the girl from Georgia are lax; she's too indolent to work her tongue. Wherever we live, we imitate the sound patterns we are accustomed to hearing. Until professional training develops our critical sense, most of us do not bother to

analyze the sounds we make when we talk. We are too busy making ourselves understood.

The ability to speak dialect perfectly is part of the equipment of any player, *provided the dialect isn't part of his natural voice.*

Tallulah Bankhead, a Southerner by birth, lost her Southern accent, achieved a British drawl while playing in London, combined the two into a soft, full, natural American voice, and, years later, on starring in "The Little Foxes," reverted to her Southern voice. But the "below-the-line" accent was a stage mechanic, not a natural contribution.

Helen Claire, the original Cindy Lou Bethany of Clare Booth's "Kiss the Boys Goodbye," went through somewhat the same experience. Before she had a chance to use her Alabama accent on Broadway, she had to lose it, acquire a nonaccented radio voice for fashion commenting on the air, and, later, go back to the deep South for the Booth play.

EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE USE OF DIALECT IN STAGE PLAYS

Western. The cowboy moving picture star in "Boy Meets Girl":¹
"Just because I don't get Gable's fan mail don't mean I ain't got his following. A lot of gals that want to write me ain't never learned how."

New York Slums. The street kid in "Dead End":²

"Yeah. Ony we didn' have money enough fuh de license. Gee, it seems like yestiddy. We wuz talkin' about it right heah. And Marty was boined wid acid and tings."

New England. The New Englander Zeena in "Ethan Frome":³
"Taint right I sh'd have to keep on doin' everythin' myself. I'm beginnin' to wonder if she's wuth it."

Negro in "Porgy" by Du Bose Heyward:⁴ "I hyuh say he gits good money fum de w'ite folks. If he aint't lookin' at de rollin' bones, he always gots eye on de women.

¹ "Boy Meets Girl," by Sam and Bella Spewack. Reprinted by courtesy of Random House.

² "Dead End," by Sidney Kingsley. Reprinted by courtesy of Random House.

³ "Ethan Frome," a dramatization of Edith Wharton's novel, by Owen and Donald Davis, Charles Scribner's Sons.

⁴ George H. Doran Company,

"Yuh po' ole wall-eyed, sof-headed gran'daddy! Aint't yuh shame tuh set dey befo' me, an' talk sweet mouth' 'bout dat murderin' Crown's Bess? Ef I wuzz yo age an' er man, I'd sabe my sof wo'd fer de Gawd-farin' ladies."

Speaking the King's English

Once in a while you hear a story about a young American actress who rises to fame because she has had London Academy of Dramatic Art training or experience on the English stage.

The secret, so the story goes, is that she has been given the part because of her *English* accent.

I'm not so sure about that. Although her superior training in diction has undoubtedly contributed to her value as an actress, you would be very likely to find, on further investigation, that her *accent* had comparatively little to do with the selection. An *English accent* can be adopted by any experienced player, just as a Southern or Italian or French accent can be assumed. It's as much a feature of playing the part as make-up or body movements.

But the *diction*—the physical means by which the words, whether they are spoken in the King's English or the President's, are projected—that's the stage mechanic with which we are now immediately concerned.

My advice to the American actor is: Speak the American language and speak it clearly, distinctly, and unaffectedly. "Bean" for "been" and "cawn't" for "can't" won't fool any producer into believing that you've had ten years' experience at the Drury Lane.

Releasing the Emotions

I HAVE said that there are three kinds of stage mechanics:

1. Physical mechanics

Body movements

Hands

Eyes

Voice

Make-up

Sense of location

2. Mental mechanics

Imagination

Observation

Thought

3. Emotional mechanics

Stimulus

Impression

Effect

The physical mechanics we have developed in detail in the foregoing chapters. Now we come to the development of the more sensitive inner mechanics, the working of the mind and emotion,

which are given outward expression by use of the physical mechanics.

Does that sound mysterious? It shouldn't. Because there is no excuse for enshrouding the mental and emotional mechanics with a veil of mystery. They are just as much a part of the actor's technique as the use of his voice or hands. And their use can be developed by practical application of rules, just as the voice can be trained or the body taught grace.

What Is Genius?

Sometimes you hear a critic speak of the work of an actor as "magic." (Actors use the term, too.) Unfortunate word, magic, since it leaves the reader or listener with the mistaken idea that the actor has simply stood still and, without any personal effort, waited for some bolt from the blue to give him this magical quality that lends beauty and truth to his acting. *They say the actor has genius.*

I do not like that word—*genius*.

The lack of it is too easy an excuse for failing, if you haven't succeeded, and its presence is too good an ego mechanism for explaining the success of your career, if you do get on. I don't know why any man or woman who has worked hard at his job should not admit that whatever he has achieved in the way of stage success is due to his own hard work and application of technique rather than to a magical dispensation of providence.

I'll say, then, that genius, if there is such a thing, is the capacity for learning how to do a thing and then doing it well. More successful stage careers have been built on intelligence and application than by listening to the magic voice of genius.

Emotional Response

In this day of surface living, there isn't much time in private life for personal development of our emotional reactions. The radio and motion pictures have taken the place of the home entertainment we enjoyed when we had to depend on ourselves for amusement.

In the evening after dinner our friends dropped in. Someone played the piano (usually very badly); someone else sang (often off key); and another told stories. The performances were not professional, but they were spontaneous, and they offered a kind of self-development that is now missing from our busy lives.

Today we let someone else provide the amusement. Why sit at home every night for a week and read *Les Misérables* when it is playing at a movie around the corner in an eighty-minute version?

Why learn to sing "Roses of Picardy" when we can turn on the radio and hear Lawrence Tibbett sing it perfectly?

And why try to tell stories when the newspaper columnists have a daily quota of good ones?

The trouble with this kind of reasoning is obvious. We are contributing nothing of ourselves, and we are not developing our emotions through talk and song and behavior. To be a good storyteller, one must use voice, expression, and gesture. To play and sing (even badly) gives freedom of expression and emotional release.

Emotions, if not used, wither and die. We may feel deeply, but unless we exercise this feeling when it comes to us, through outside stimulus, and then release it through speech, gesture, or expression, we have lost the actor's greatest opportunity: to impress his audience with what he feels through what he thinks, does, and says.

Thought and Emotion

Thought and emotion—the mental and emotional mechanics—are interrelated.

Thought is a concept or judgment produced by sober reflection; *Emotion* is the power by which a thought is forcefully impressed upon the minds of an audience.

Emotional spontaneity—the high energy by which an actor gets over to his audience the thing that is uppermost in his mind and heart, is the quality that all performers strive for and that they achieve to a greater or less degree, depending upon how and how hard they work for it.

It is effort, not fundamental qualifications, that produces this emotional energy. It can be yours if you try for it.

Intake and Outgo

In order to make clear to you the process by which an actor receives impressions, makes them his own, and then passes them on to his audience, I have prepared a chart:

1. *Intake* of impulses (emotional): taking in of sense impressions of sight, taste, smell, sound, touch.
2. *Working stage* (mental): the period in which the impression is kept in the mind, studied, analyzed, and made our own in reverie. The memory and imagination are called into use in this stage.
3. *Outgo* of impulses (emotional and mental): the giving out of impressions through the physical mechanics: eyes, hands, body, voice.

Every Thought and Emotion Has an Outer or Physical Sign of Expression

For instance, if our bodies can express utter despair or buoyant joy *without words*, then it follows that the ability to act depends greatly on the development of body response. There must be coordination of mind and body.

There is no set expression for any given emotion, nor is there one physical move for its expression. The actor has to depend on his discretion and control to make just the right move at the right moment. By bringing his imagination into play, he will be able to create many varieties of movement to cover one situation.

Examples: You are greeting a friend. You wave your hand, using a broad gesture. (You are warmly attached to this friend, and the degree of your attachment is shown through the warmth of your gesture.)

You are greeting a casual acquaintance. This time your gesture is restrained. You simply lift the hand.



In Philip Barry's "The Philadelphia Story," Katharine Hepburn, as the youthful, headstrong Tracy Lord, turns the tables by interviewing the skeptical young newspaper man (Van Heflin) who has been sent to interview her. (*Courtesy of Theatre Guild.*)

You are a public character driving through a city, acknowledging the plaudits of the crowd. You do not use a broad gesture; you do not wave; you incline your head and smile.

Sense Impressions

The essence of acting is emotional expression. Since the actor cannot by voice alone convey the dramatic message of an entire play, he must help the interpretation by creating sense impressions. The audience has no means of looking into the character's mind; it must react to what it sees and hears.

By his very presence on the stage, the actor is creating a sense impression. The audience watches him (sight), listens to him (sound). When the actor tastes an apple and makes a wry face,

the audience knows the apple is sour. When he picks up a hot iron, it winces with him. When he smells a flower, it responds by his response.

Example: In "The Gentle People," when Franchot Tone brought orchids to Sylvia Sidney, the audience knew by his eloquent disgust that orchids have no odor.

These small bits of business correspond to paragraphs of descriptive material in a book. The reader of the book is able to enter the character's mind, to know the pain of the hot iron, how large a blister it raised, the shock it gave the nervous system. But the actor has no time for this explanation. The play must go on, and so, by one brief, concentrated movement, the actor must convey the impression of pain and shock and, at the same time, hint at the consequences of the accident.

An actor must recognize an emotion before he can hope to interpret it. For instance, on playing the part of a murderer, although he may not actually feel the impulse to murder, yet at some time, either during rehearsal or while studying the part, he must reach a sympathetic understanding (through his imagination) of the motive that prompted the character to commit murder.

When Katharine Cornell played Shirley Pride in "The Way Things Happen," she said she believed in the girl's peculiar psychology. In other words, the actress sympathized with the girl's problem and understood her behavior.

But so tense was the action required to make the character credible that Miss Cornell found herself burned up emotionally. After a while she acquired a technique that enabled her to take the crashing scenes without flaying herself to pieces.

To anyone new at the business, the striving for strong emotional interpretation is an exhausting task. Only when the actor learns to project or *give out the emotion to his audience, through physical behavior and voice, instead of allowing it to remain within him, thereby consuming him,* is he able to make the most of his emotional effect.

Emotions Expressed through Behavior

Each human being has a way of expressing what he feels through physical behavior, no matter how feeble the expression may be. In some of us the signs are weak and restrained. Often a shy person is intense and highly sensitive, but, because of lack of social contact, communication of thought, interchange of ideas and opinions, he has never had occasion to give expression to his emotional capacities.

In others, the expression is overdone and superficial. The smooth actor with surface cleverness may have no difficulty in expressing himself through behavior, but in most cases there will be no real meaning behind his speech and actions.

Most of our best performers come from the first class. If the capacity for emotion is there, it can usually be developed.

To the new actor, then, comes the problem of regulating or developing his expression of emotion. If he is restricted, his expression must be made to flow freely. If he is too vigorous, his output must be regulated and controlled.

Whatever he does must be his own expression. It is seldom that two people react exactly the same way under the same circumstances. The reaction to an elementary emotion such as fear, anger, hate, love will differ by degree of the character's background and training.

EXAMPLES

1. *Fear*

In time of disaster at sea, the ship's disciplined officers and crew are controlled and calm, whereas the passengers are usually disorderly. This doesn't mean that the officers are inwardly calm. Background and custom have made them that way. Soldiers in battle may be paralyzed with fright, but they advance because of duty and training.

Fear is a defensive emotion. It may paralyze one man and cause another to run. We cringe, huddle, hold our hands to our body for protection. The impulse is to withdraw. Yet at times fear

paralyzes the faculties, denying the power of movement. Fear may hold one fascinated, without the power of thought, as in the case of a man in a forest taken unawares by and unprepared for a wild beast.

Although the natural physical reaction to fear is nausea, increased breathing, and heart action, many who have faced great fear say they felt nothing at all. They were beyond feeling.

The expression of our fear, then, is regulated by the kind of person we are.

2. *Anger*

When we experience anger, a muscular and glandular activity takes place. The jaw muscles tighten, preventing clear speech; the eyes flash or dilate, the mouth trembles or is set tightly. Color rushes to the face. The fists clench. The entire body is charged with vibration. Anger is an offensive impulse. We are prompted to strike out.

Yet anger on the stage may be expressed in a variety of ways. One character may lose control of himself, rage and storm and smash things; another may remain outwardly calm, controlling his rage. None of the outer physical signs will betray his fury, except perhaps a very slight twitch of the lip. His voice will remain steady and cold as he warns his aggressor that some day he will pay for this. His anger becomes the more deadly and sinister, for he has diverted his emotions into an objective plan—revenge.

3. *Love*

The expression of love depends on sex, age, background, and relationship.

In "Cyrano de Bergerac," love takes the form of supreme sacrifice as Cyrano writes passionate love letters to Roxanne for the dull, handsome Christian.

In "Monna Vanna," Guido, Vanna's husband, goes into a jealous rage when she announces her intention of going to Princiville's tent to intercede for her people.

The mellow love-making of middle-aged Peter Stuyvesant (Walter Huston) in "Knickerbocker Holiday" does not attract Trina as does the more exciting love of impetuous young Broek.

In defending her child, a mother becomes fierce in her love. Fear and defiance are mingled with it. Love of an ideal makes men risk loss of friendship. Love of a country turns men into killers. The hardest criminal may love his mother.

The same emotions (disappointment or excitement, for example) may be expressed in a variety of ways, just as different emotions (joy and grief) may be expressed in the same manner.

Disappointment crushes and defeats one man. To another it acts as a challenge. Instead of slumping, hanging his head, allowing his body to express defeat, he straightens his shoulders, pushes out his chin, and looks up. He rises even stronger than before.

Excitement confuses one woman. She moves about agitatedly, mislaying things, forgetting what she wanted to do, talking in a high, rapid voice, while her husband, equally excited but controlled, follows her around picking up the things she drops.

Excitement may be conveyed by a catch in the voice or a gleam in the eye.

The act of crying expresses joy, relief, excitement just as effectively as it expresses grief and sorrow. Laughter covers disappointment, embarrassment, and grief.

Emotions are so closely related that it is possible to feel more than one at a time. For instance, we are delighted to get a part, but we pity the other actor who has been rejected. We are happy to be going away but hate to leave our friends behind. Someone gives us a present that is utterly useless and ridiculous, but we are moved by the thought.

It has been said in anger; "I could kill you for doing that, but I adore you."

The exasperated mother who punishes her child does so because she loves it.

Transition of Emotions

Delsarte once said, "There is not a pleasure which is not followed by disappointment or satiety; not a joy which does not entail some trouble, not an affection which does not conceal some bitterness, some grief and often some remorse."

When one emotion follows another, sweeping him from the heights to the depths in a few short seconds, the actor must be able to blend the emotions. To get a smooth transition he must understand the inner moods of the character. To express these moods he should always remember that expression precedes gesture, and gesture precedes speech. Emotion incites movement; speech labels the movement.

EXAMPLES OF TRANSITION

Scene from "Seventh Heaven" by Austin Strong¹

After a tender love scene in which Chico and Diane marry themselves, Diane follows Chico to the door as he leaves for war.

CHICO

No. No. Stand still. Don't move. I want to see you last like this. Let me fill my eyes with you. I shall come to you each morning at this hour. Every day you will feel me here with you. (*He tries to laugh and turns away*) Au revoir—Heaven! (*He exits quickly, closing the door*)

Diane stands very still. Her mood is tender and loving; she has just been married. She goes to the door dreamily and leans against it, her whole mood and posture expressive of ecstatic happiness. Slowly the door opens, disclosing her bullying and brutal sister Nana, who is obviously drunk and in an ugly mood.

DIANE

(*Stiffens with terror and cries out in alarm*) Nana . . . you're ill!

¹ "Seventh Heaven," by Austin Strong. Copyright, 1922, by Austin Strong and John Golden. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of Samuel French.

Scene from "Ethan Frome"¹

In "Ethan Frome," Zeena (Pauline Lord) is pleasantly teasing Mattie about Denis, a neighbor, who is obviously interested in Mattie. Quite unconsciously, Mattie reveals her growing interest in Ethan, Zeena's husband.

ZEENA

Paupers can't be choosey, Mattie.

MATTIE

Oh, I'm not choosey . . . Zeena . . . honest I'm not. (*She chuckles at the thought of Denis*) Like I was sayin' to Ethan only last night . . . I says, nobody ain't never asked me yet, I said, and he said, if he wasn't married he might ask me himself . . . so 'course I said, sayin' that don't mean anythin' . . . But still'n all, I says, it's real nice of you to say it . . . and it was, too, wasn't it?

Zeena sits up rigidly in the bed, her friendly attitude changing rapidly to one of jealous anger. Mattie glances at her, suddenly terrified. Zeena stops eating and pushes the tray away from her. She stares at Mattie with hatred.

[Transition from happiness to fear to great surprise]

MATTIE

It ain't right to talk like this, Ethan. . . . It's awful interestin', though. . . . (*She hears the distant sound of a dog howling and clings to Ethan, frightened*) What's that?

ETHAN

Nothin'.

MATTIE

Was it a fox?

ETHAN

No. It was just a dog howling.

¹ "Ethan Frome," a dramatization of Edith Wharton's novel, by Owen and Donald Davis, Charles Scribner's Sons.

MATTIE

A dog. That means death, don't it? . . . I ain't superstitious, but . . .

ETHAN

Then it don't mean nothin'. . . Besides, you have to hear a dog howl twice; and even then 'tain't sure!

MATTIE

Maybe it won't be fifty years, Ethan! (*They move toward the house. Sudden Mattie stops and exclaims with great surprise*) Ethan . . . look! The house is dark!

EXERCISES

These exercises will give you an imagination test, followed by a test of your ability to project your imagination through body actions.

1. Joy

Imagine that the telegram just received says you have inherited enough money to take you around the world—a cruise of which you have always dreamed! Let animated joy flow through you. Laugh, dance; let the mood of happiness carry you along.

2. Fear

Imagine an air raid. The sound of the airplanes drones above your house. Bombs burst in the street. The smell of poison gas fills your room. You look frantically for means of escape. You are overcome and sink to the floor.

Now sit down and write three examples. Create little comedies or dramas from your imagination. Then act them. Try different ways of expressing each emotion.

3. Sorrow

Imagine that someone dear to you is dead. The shock has been great. Let your body slump slowly and shake with violent sobbing.

4. *Anger*

Imagine that someone has deliberately smashed a beautiful and expensive watch that you treasure. Stamp your foot in anger. Breathe rapidly and pace up and down. Develop the mood.

5. *Annoyance*

You are dressing to go out. It is already quite late. It is your first engagement with a new friend. The doorbell rings. You run to answer it. A friend of the family is there. She is not only a colossal bore but extremely inquisitive. You try in your most subtle manner to convey to her that you must be going, that you can't spare another minute, but she sits down, removes her wraps, and makes herself comfortable.

6. *Embarrassment*

You are packing to go away. Clothes, trunks, boxes, and packages litter every chair in the room. In your old clothes you couldn't possibly look worse. The bell rings. At the door you find someone whom you have been trying very hard to impress.

7. *Surprise*

You are feeling very lonely and wondering what has become of a dear friend. You haven't heard from him for years. You think how wonderful it would be to see him once more. The doorbell rings! You answer it, and there stands your friend!

The blending of mental and emotional energy with physical action, or technique, is the most difficult accomplishment in all art, and in proportion to an artist's ability to do this is his greatness. It is our sensitivity that directs our acting interpretation and hooks up the mental or inner side of acting with the outward or physical side. This sensitivity gives us discretion and judgment in timing, both in speech, gesture, and action; it tells us the appropriateness of a gesture. It gives us insight into character and tells us why certain people react in certain ways.

Sensitivity is the link between the outer physical action and the inner emotion. It determines our degree of responsiveness. Emotion without control loses its power. Our sensitivity acts as a check.

The imagination and the senses work in unison. The development of one helps the other. All great performers possess delicate, controlled sensitivity. Although you may possess a natural sensitivity, practical training will intensify it.

We all know that our senses require some stimulation from without to make them active. In order to appreciate a beautiful scene to its fullest, we must be able to observe it. We open our ears and enjoy a symphony. We inhale the delicate perfume of a flower. Our sense of touch depends on our contact with the object. The taste of a ripe peach lingers on our tongue.

Yet this same stimulation may be aroused within us without benefit of close contact. We can, by imagination, see something in our mind's eye and recall from memory any sense. We can exercise our senses by calling upon our imagination.

The Mechanics of Emotion

There are three stages of emotion: stimulus, impression, and outer effect. Before we can feel an emotion there must be an either real or imagined stimulus. Suppose an actor is given a part he longs to play (stimulus). He is delighted. Here is his opportunity at last (impression). His face radiates. He thanks the producer, assures him he will make good (outer effect).

The actor can also stimulate the emotions by imagination.

Example: Suppose we are thinking about nothing in particular. From nowhere an idea comes to us that we are catching cold (cause—the imagined idea has alarmed you). Maybe I had better take some medicine, you think (the thought has made an *impression* upon you). You go to the medicine cabinet and anxiously search for pills (this is the *effect* of the imagined cause that you are catching cold).

This is the simple process of all emotional behavior, whether on the stage or in real life, and the stage is merely a copy of real

life. To the actor who has an understanding of this principle of analysis, every piece of action will be clear.

Since the actor cannot always have a tangible stimulus, he must exercise his emotions through his imagination and memory. For instance, the prop orchids that Franchot Tone smelled in the "Gentle People" may have been made of cotton or paper, but through his memory, which tells him that orchids have no odor, he projected the sense impression to the audience. The degree of his disgust was determined by his added comment (characteristic of the cheap, sporty gangster) of how much the flowers cost.

EXAMPLES OF EMOTIONAL PROCESS

Scene from "My Lady's Dress" by Edward Knoblock¹

Anita, a beautiful new model, is being detained after store hours by Jacquelin, designer and store owner, as punishment for snubbing the attention of an important patron. Anita is upset because she wishes to be home in time to see the doctor who is calling upon her sick mother. The shop is deserted except for Anita and Jacquelin, who is called to answer the telephone just beyond the black velvet curtains of the models' dressing room.

Already beside herself, Anita hears Jacquelin say over the telephone:

JACQUELIN

Hullo! Hullo! Yes. Oh, it's you, Tommie, dear boy! Go to one of the Halls tonight? Awf'ly sorry. No, I can't. Got to work and more besides. Usual thing. Pulling one of my girls into shape. Obstreperous? Yes, a bit. They're all like that at first, poor darlings! Same old story. Yes. All pay and no work. Must get home. Dying mother and all that!

ANITA

(Breathless with indignation) Mr. Jacquelin!

¹ "My Lady's Dress," by Edward Knoblock. Copyright, 1911, 1916, by Edward Knoblock. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of Samuel French.

JACQUELIN

(*Into telephone*) What? Yes! Ha! Ha! Of course! Ma's real name's Algy or Reggie, of course. And she's waiting in some private bar off Leicester Square with a waxed moustache and a five-shilling piece! Yes! Ha! Ha!

ANITA

(*Trembling with rage*) Mr. Jacquelin! . . . You've no right! . . . My mother! . . .

JACQUELIN

(*Into telephone*) What do you say? Yes, yes. Only a matter of a week or so, and she'll be eating out of my hand. What? Certainly. Pass her on to you? Certainly. Whenever you like. Ta, ta, old boy. Sorry. Bless you!

Anita loses complete control over herself as she thinks of her desperately sick mother, remembers the other model's advice that nothing can be gained by defying Jacquelin. She remembers his taunts earlier in the evening—that he will break her spirit, that if she leaves this job she won't get another because he will not give her references. Her eyes fall upon a large pair of dressmaker's scissors. Suddenly, as Jacquelin stops his conversation and starts to return to her, she opens the scissors, plunges one blade through the curtain. The scissors stick there. Anita stands horrified, her hands to her mouth. From behind the curtain comes one short cry!

In this scene the stimulus or motive for the stabbing is the telephone conversation that Anita overhears, combined with Jacquelin's earlier taunting. Her anxiety for her mother's welfare increases with the fear of losing her job if she doesn't comply with the bullying Jacquelin (impression). She sees the scissors and resolves to stab him. She plunges the knife through the curtain and kills him (effect or physical action).

Scene from "Seventh Heaven," by Austin Strong¹

Diane, oppressed and beaten by her sister Nana, becomes enraged when Nana tears away the medal from Diane's neck

¹ From "Seventh Heaven," by Austin Strong. Copyright, 1922, by Austin Strong and John Golden. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of Samuel French.

(symbolic of a wedding ring). This is stimulus or motive for her action. Diane, who has become fearless through her love for Chico, realizes that now she is stronger than her bullying sister. She becomes defiant (impression caused by Nana's treatment of the medal). She grabs the whip away from Nana and strikes her (action or effect).

Memory

Memory is not restricted to the faculty of retaining words; there is memory through the senses of all the organs in the body. Memory includes all the sense faculties of sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste.

We recognize a melody because it has lingered in our memory. If we pick up a telephone and hear a snarling sound, we quickly put the receiver away. We remember the earache we suffered the last time we glued the receiver to our ears. If we are standing near a firecracker that is on the verge of explosion, we put our hands over our ears or retreat.

We imagine things in the present because we recall them from the past. Without memory we could form no comparisons, reason, or judgment. If we are exhausted and weary, we recall a soft couch on which we would like to rest. When we are hot and parched, we imagine ourselves sitting in the shade with a long, cool drink. If we are hungry, we imagine the gustatory pleasures of a thick, juicy steak. We know that bees sting, glass cuts, fire burns, because at some time in our life we have experienced or seen someone experience these effects.

Observation

Observation is accurate spot news. It is factual knowledge that we gain by watching. It stimulates the imagination and makes us participate rather than remain passive. We see and form our own opinions instead of accepting the opinions of others.

The richness of detail with which the actor recalls sight impressions and conveys them through tone and gesture to the audience

makes his performance a vital and glowing thing. Instead of merely repeating dialogue, he is able to give the words depth and reality.

The following scene from "Idiot's Delight," by Robert E. Sherwood, suggests that Irene is recalling a vivid sight impression.

EXAMPLES OF SIGHT

Scene from "Idiot's Delight," by Robert E. Sherwood¹

IRENE

It was! But I shall be forever grateful to them . . . those Tommies. They saved my life when I escaped from the Soviets. For days and nights . . . I don't know how many . . . I was driving through the snow . . . snow . . . snow . . . snow . . . in a little sleigh, with the body of my father beside me, and the wolves running along like an escort of dragoons. You know . . . you always think of wolves as howling constantly, don't you?

MRS. CHERRY

Please! I know you don't want to talk about it any more.

IRENE

Oh, no . . . it is so far away now. But I shall never forget the moment when I came through the haze of delirium, and saw the faces of those Tommies . . . those simple, friendly faces. And the snow . . . the wolves . . . and the terrible cold . . . they were all gone . . . and I was looking at Kew Gardens on a Sunday afternoon, and the sea of golden daffodils . . . "fluttering and dancing in the breeze." . . .

Scene from "Pelléas and Mélisande," by Maurice Maeterlinck²

PELLÉAS

Yes, it is here; we are there. It is so dark you cannot tell the entrance of the grotto from the rest of the night. There are no stars on this side. Let us wait till the moon has torn through that great cloud; it will light up the whole grotto, and then we can enter without danger. There are dangerous places, and the path is very narrow between two lakes whose

¹ "Idiot's Delight," by Robert E. Sherwood, Charles Scribner's Sons.

² From "Pelléas and Mélisande," by Maurice Maeterlinck. Used by permission of Dodd, Mead & Company, Inc., and George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.

bottom has not yet been found. I did not think the light of the sky will be enough for us. . . . You have never gone into this grotto?

MÉLISANDE

No. . . .

PELLÉAS

Let us go in; let us go in. . . . You must be able to describe the place where you lost the ring, if he questions you. . . . It is very big and very beautiful. There are stalactites that look like plants and men. It is full of blue darks. It has not yet been explored to the end. There are great treasures hidden there, it seems. You will see the remains of ancient shipwrecks there. But you must not go far in it without a guide. There have been some who never have come back. I myself dare not go forward too far. We will stop the moment we no longer see the light of the sea or the sky. When you strike a little light there, you would say the vault was covered with stars like the sky. It is bits of crystal or salt, they say, that shine so in the rock. . . . Look, look, I think the sky is going to clear. Give me your hand; do not tremble, do not tremble so. . . .

EXERCISES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF OBSERVATION

1. Pick up a pencil. Observe its color. What does the lacquer consist of? Where did the metal originate? The rubber? What kind of wood is it? How is it put together? Where did the lead originate? Concentrate on the pencil and forget everything else. At first your mind will wander away. Many other thoughts will creep in. When this happens, stop and begin again. This simple exercise will give you the power to focus your attention completely on one object or one problem at a time.

2. Now close your eyes and try to *see* the pencil. Visualize it until you are able really to see it. Describe it in detail. Don't let your mind wander from the subject.

3. Notice the chair before you. Focus your attention on it. Estimate the distance it is from you. What shape is it? What color? What sort of material is used in the upholstering? What period is it? Does it belong in its surroundings? If you moved it

to another location, would its appearance be more pleasing? Keep your mind and attention on the chair and don't let them wander.

4. Close your eyes and try to *see* the chair. Visualize it until you are able to really see it. Describe it in detail. Don't let your mind wander.

5. Pick up a flower. Notice its color, how it blends into different shades, its perfume. How would it look in its natural surroundings? In a garden? In a hothouse? Growing wild?

6. See the flower in your imagination. Describe it in detail in each of several different surroundings.

Do these exercises until you are able to stimulate your imagination through visualizing a landscape, a statue, a picture. Think of a man with whom you are associated daily. Visualize his face. Place every feature in your mind.

Touch

Through training, the sense of touch may be highly developed. The bank teller can instantly detect a counterfeit coin or spurious paper money. Linen and wool experts depend upon their sense of touch. How disagreeable can be the feel of a moist, clammy handshake; and how pleasant a friendly one!

EXERCISES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF TOUCH APPRECIATION

1. Pass your fingers over a piece of sandpaper. Then over a smooth piece of paper. Note the difference in touch sensation. Now, lightly touch the sandpaper with the tip of your finger, then the smooth piece. Alternate with the fingers of each hand to get the feel of rough and smooth material.

2. Pass a linen handkerchief between your hands. Then a cotton handkerchief. Now one of silk. Then a piece of velvet. Try to detect the difference in the feel of each texture. Try the left hand and then the right.

3. What is the feel of a felt hat compared with that of a piece of wool? With linen? Cotton? Silk? Can you name these materials with your eyes closed?

4. Pick up a paper of matches and drop it quickly. Which fingers came in contact with it? Do this exercise three times and note the exact fingers that held the matches. Now use a coin or any small object. Alternate your hands. See if your left hand is as sensitive as your right.

5. Place six books on a table. Use your right hand to sort the books by weight from the lightest to the heaviest. Now mix them and sort them again with your eyes closed. First use your right hand, then your left. Try to remember the title of each book by its size and feel.

Imagine the touch of the following objects. Name your feeling reaction:

1. Holding a large piece of ice.
2. Touching a velvet dressing gown.
3. Handling a rosebush.
4. Wrapping a book in cellophane.
5. Picking up a very hot plate.
6. Holding a bar of wet soap.
7. Handling a loaded revolver.
8. Picking up a razor blade from the floor.
9. Switching on the light and getting a short circuit.
10. Finding that your shower is ice-cold.

EXAMPLES OF TOUCH

Scene from "My Lady's Dress," by Edward Knoblock¹

A silk weaver's home in Lyons, France. Rondier, a silk buyer, enters. He examines the silk through a small magnifying glass.

ANNETTE

Yes. It's ready. Won't you sit down? I'll just wake my husband. He's been working all night to get it done.

RONDIER

No! Don't! Don't! (*Sees Joanny*) Oh, you're here, are you?

¹ "My Lady's Dress," by Edward Knoblock. Copyright, 1911, 1916, by Edward Knoblock. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of Samuel French.

JOANNY

Now, there's a pretty surprise for you, eh?

ANNETTE

(*By her husband's chair, gently*) Nicolas!

RONDIER

No! Let him sleep. He deserves it. (*Examines the silk*) Splendid! Splendid! Ha! One can always tell Nicolas' work at a glance.

JOANNY

Can one?

RONDIER

I can, at any rate. I suppose (*he touches other silk disdainfully*) this . . . is yours?

JOANNY

How could you guess?

Another scene from the same play:

IVAN

Louka! You haven't put that sable with the others?

LOUKA

(*Points to the door*) No! It's still on the door.

IVAN

(*Turns to Anna his wife with a smile*) We're not going to sell that, Annoushka, are we?

ANNA

How should I know, little father?

IVAN

How should you know? Because if I've told you once, I've told you a dozen times. That's the sable I trapped the day our little Vanitchka was born.

ANNA

Oh, that's the sable, is it?

IVAN

Yes. And when I get to the village I'm going to take it to the tailor. And he shall make a cap of it. And when the winter comes little Vanitchka shall wear it! Just think of his rosy face peeping out of the dark fur! Ha! Ha!

ANNA

(Mumbling) A sheepskin cap would do quite as well.

IVAN

What do you say?

ANNA

(Fingers the sable thoughtfully) Nothing. Only this is a very fine skin, Ivan.

IVAN

One of the finest I ever caught. Do you see the pretty little marks on it? Quite unusual.

Scene from "Pelléas and Mélisande," by Maurice Maeterlinck¹

PELLÉAS

Oh! Oh! what is it? . . . Thy hair, thy hair is falling down to me! All thy locks, Mélisande, all thy locks have fallen down the tower! I hold them in my hands; I hold them in my mouth. . . . I hold them in my arms; I put them about my neck. . . . I will not open my hands again tonight.

MÉLISANDE

Let me go! Let me go! Thou wilt make me fall!

PELLÉAS

No, no, no: I have never seen such hair as thine, Mélisande! See, see, see; it comes from so high, and yet it floods me to the heart! And yet it

¹ From "Pelléas and Mélisande," by Maurice Maeterlinck. Used by permission of Dodd, Mead & Company, Inc., and George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.

floods me to the knees! And it is sweet, sweet as if it fell from heaven! I see the sky no longer through thy locks. Thou seest, thou seest? I can no longer hold them with both hands; there are some on the boughs of the willow. . . . They are alive like birds in my hands.

LITTLE YNIOLD

Oh, this stone is heavy! It is heavier than I am. . . . It is heavier than everybody. . . . It is heavier than everything that ever happened. I can see my golden ball between the rock and this naughty stone, and I cannot reach it. . . . My little arm is not long enough . . . and this stone won't be lifted. . . . I can't lift it . . . and nobody could lift it. . . . It is heavier than the whole house. . . . You would think it had roots in the earth.

Taste

To many people, eating is a necessity, not a pleasure. When they are hungry, they satisfy their appetites, but cultivation of a sense of taste plays no part in their lives.

To the actor, a palate that recognizes the delicate nuances of food is almost a necessity, since frequently he is called upon to express a response to taste through physical behavior. And that reaction must be an accurate expression of the taste specified.

EXERCISES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF FOOD APPRECIATION

Let us imagine the taste of the following articles and state our reaction to them:

1. A freshly cut lemon
2. Sugar
3. Roquefort cheese
4. Quinine
5. Sauerkraut
6. Honey
7. Tea
8. Strawberries
9. Ham
10. Young onions

As you imagine the different tastes, let your face and body register like and dislike.

EXAMPLES OF TASTE

Scene from "Boy Meets Girl," by Sam and Bella Spewack¹

SUSIE

Try the chicken soup. It's very good.

RODNEY

Are you seriously suggesting that I filch some of this broth?

SUSIE

We make it special for B.K., with nine chickens.

RODNEY

Well, dash it, I will eat it. Just to make the joke good!

SUSIE

It's hot!

RODNEY

So I've learned.

SUSIE

When did you eat last?

RODNEY

I had my lunch an hour ago.

SUSIE

Have some crackers with it?

.

SUSIE

(*Susie uncovers the lunch tray*) Some day I'll go to high school. That's my secret ambition. Try the ham hocks. The cook eats them himself. He comes from Czechoslovakia.

¹ "Boy Meets Girl," by Sam and Bella Spewack. Reprinted by courtesy of Random House.

RODNEY

Does he really? Look here. . . . I feel an awful swine guzzling by myself. Won't you join me?

SUSIE

Well, I'm not very hungry, but I can eat.

RODNEY

Good!

SUSIE

It's funny how I keep on eating.

RODNEY

Some ham hocks?

SUSIE

No. Happy doesn't like ham. He likes milk.

RODNEY

I beg your pardon. . . . Did you say milk?

SUSIE

Yes. Milk.

RODNEY

(Pours glass of milk) There you are.

SUSIE

Thanks.

RODNEY

Cozy, this . . . what?

SUSIE

It's good milk. Have some?

Smell

What is your sense reaction to the following objects: how does each affect your sense of smell?

1. Hot coffee early in the morning
2. A piece of twisted lemon peel
3. A pot of boiling glue
4. Frying bacon
5. A rose. A gardenia. A violet
6. Gasoline. Alcohol. Paint
7. Bread baking
8. Fresh crushed mint leaves
9. Cigarette; an old pipe
10. Cloves. Cinnamon

EXAMPLES OF SMELL

Scene from "Tovarich," by Jacques Deval

TATIANA: (To her husband, Mikail) It is our kitchen, Mikail. Breathe the air, my darling. . . . It smells of onions and coal gas and brown soap . . . but when you breathe it in, it becomes the air of Russia . . . cold and clean. Wherever we may go, it will be the same. In our lungs, and our eyes, and our hearts will be Russia!

Scene from "Ethan Frome," by Owen and Donald Davis¹

ETHAN

Brought you somethin', Matt!

MATTIE

(Eagerly) Why, what? (He pulls cork out of the top of the jug, holds out the jug for her to smell)

ETHAN

Mrs. Andrew Hale give it to me. (She takes jug and sets it on table)

MATTIE

Why, my sakes . . . that's apple cider, ain't it? (Then suspiciously) It ain't gone hard or nothin'?

¹ "Ethan Frome," a dramatization of Edith Wharton's novel, by Owen and Donald Davis, Charles Scribner's Sons.

ETHAN

Nope, Jotham and me . . . we seen that there same juice come ooizin' through the press, didn't we, Jotham?

Hearing

Sight and hearing seem to go hand in hand. On seeing a thrush, our first impulse is to listen for its song. Yet notice how the blind can recognize another merely by the sound of his voice. The director of a symphony of fifty musicians can detect one false note. A skilled mechanic listening to a motor can tell exactly what is wrong—not that his hearing is more acute than that of the average person but his *sense* of hearing has become sharpened by necessity.

EXERCISES

1. In the quiet of your room try to detect the various sounds. Separate them. Street traffic, a motor running, or a child playing. Listen attentively; hear every sound. Write all the sounds on a piece of paper. Then check to see if you have missed any.

2. Listen attentively. Focus your attention on one of the sounds and shut out all the others. For instance, if a clock is ticking near you, shut out all the street noises by concentrating on the clock. Do this with any sound that comes to your ear.

What does each of the following sounds suggest to you? Imagine the sounds first, then your reaction to them:

1. The song of a bird in the morning.
2. The creaking of a board in the middle of the night.
3. The crash of glass in the street.
4. A screaming siren.
5. The sound of a drum in marked time.
6. The backfire of an automobile.
7. The laughter of children.
8. The whirl of an egg beater.
9. The sound of a motorcycle alongside your moving car.
10. A crash of thunder.

EXAMPLES OF SOUND

Scene from "Pelléas and Mélisande," by Maurice Maeterlinck¹

MÉLISANDE

How alone one is here! There is no sound.

PELLÉAS

There is always wonderful silence here. . . . One could hear the water sleep.

PELLÉAS

There are so many things one never knows. We are ever waiting; and then . . . What is that noise? . . . They are closing the gates! . . .

MÉLISANDE

Yes, they have closed the gates. . . .

PELLÉAS

We cannot go back now? Hearest thou the bolts? Listen! Listen! . . the great chains! . . the great chains. . . . It is too late; it is too late!

MÉLISANDE

There is someone behind us!

PELLÉAS

I see no one. . . .

MÉLISANDE

I heard a noise. . . .

PELLÉAS

I hear only thy heart in the dark. . . .

MÉLISANDE

I heard the crackling of dead leaves. . . .

¹ From "Pelléas and Mélisande," by Maurice Maeterlinck. Used by permission of Dodd, Mead & Company, Inc., and George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.

PELLÉAS

Because the wind is silent all at once. . . .

.

PELLÉAS

Oh, how thou sayest that! Thy voice! Thy voice! It is cooler and more frank than the water is! It is like pure water on my lips! It is like pure water on my hands. . . .

Scene from "Ethan Frome," by Owen and Donald Davis¹

MATTIE

It ain't right to talk like this, Ethan. . . . It's awful interestin', though. (*As they start to move away from the enclosure about the burial ground, they hear the distant sound of a dog howling. Mattie listens, is frightened, clings to Ethan and cries*) What's that?

ETHAN

Nothin'.

MATTIE

Was it a fox?

ETHAN

No. It was just a dog howling.

When we use the expression, "I know what I'd do if I were in his shoes," we are saying, in effect, that we have, with the help of our imagination, projected ourself in the life of the other person; that we are able to sympathize with his problem because we share his emotional state.

The new actor who is able, literally, to put himself in the other fellow's shoes, has triumphed over the most serious obstacle in his path. He has achieved this state not only through practice and development of his own emotional reactions to life but also through a sympathetic study of how other human beings act under given circumstances.

¹ "Ethan Frome," a dramatization of Edith Wharton's novel, by Owen and Donald Davis, Charles Scribner's Sons.

This knowledge the actor gets through *observation* and *imagination*. When he sees people around him, he looks for a characteristic trait and makes it his own for future reference. His sympathy is aroused by a dejected, ill-fed wreck of humanity on the street corner. With trembling fingers, the beggar tries to wrap a thin coat around his body. Every movement spells misery.

The actor, watching the scene, makes a mental picture of the physical expressions of abject misery (observation) and, at the same time, tries to *imagine how* the man has sunk to the depths of beggardom.

During the World War, Lillian Gish played in D. W. Griffith's picture "Hearts of the World," part of which was filmed in England. When she wasn't busy, Miss Gish walked through the streets of London to study the crowds. At night, in one famous section of the city, the painted ladies of the wartime period waited for the soldiers off duty. Their pathetic antics to curry favor, their reckless attempt at gaiety so impressed the actress that she made a careful study of the expression, speech, and movements of these women.

Years later, when Miss Gish appeared in Sean O'Casey's "Within the Gates," all the things she had learned in the streets of London came to her aid in creating the character of the prostitute. Realism in the theater to her, as to all intelligent actors, was nothing more than an imitation of the many facets of human nature as she had learned them through observation, thought, and imagination.

Laughter and Tears

NEXT to applause, no sound is sweeter to the actor's ear than laughter. An audience goes to the theater to be entertained, and a sure sign of entertainment is a hearty, spontaneous laugh.

The successful comedian must be something of a psychologist; he must be able to feel the pulse of the audience. He must discover laughs where no laughs live. He must pull mirth from the dullest of dull lines.

The keener the audience the more difficult the actor's job. The accomplished comedian immediately senses the audience response. He isn't satisfied to keep pace with the people on the other side of the footlights; he knows he must always be a few steps ahead of them. If they lag a bit, he must coax them on. He must be inventive. Many an interpolated piece of business or the quick use of a vocal inflection has put humor, and consequently a laugh, into an otherwise thin scene.

The Comedian

A natural-born comedian is a man or woman with an appreciation of the humorous side of life who learns how to project this humorous gift through what he does and says. There are few, far too few, of these naturally blithe spirits, and for that reason they are always in demand in the theater.

As I have pointed out in Chapter 10, the actor must know what an emotion is before he can interpret it. Just so, it is necessary for the actor to enter a state of fun or mirthful enjoyment before he can put over a joke or a funny line. *The actor who lacks the comic sense cannot be a comedian.*

The comedian must have confidence in himself. He must not, as Mark Twain once said, "be afraid of his joke."

And the comedian must be trained. No matter how great his natural talent for fun, he cannot depend on it for humorous acting. His comic gift must undergo thorough training.

Look at the gay face, the whimsical eyebrows, the laughing mouth of the successful funmaker of the theatrical world, and you'll find behind this mirth-provoking exterior a carefully planned attack—the product of long and painstaking study.

For comedy depends on technique for its success. The comedian dares not go over the boundary line of spontaneous humor; to overact will be just as fatal as to underact. His job is to time his laugh to the twinkling of an eye, to get just the precise, joyous effect.

What Is Comedy?

Comedy is a play of laughter, whether it be sympathetic or derisive. It is based on incongruities of character, on weaknesses, mistakes, and conflicts of the human being. Because humor is based on character, we respond to it in kind with our own natural character. Thus, what may seem funny to one person will not amuse another.

And this circumstance makes doubly hard the job of the comedian. In drama, the situations are tried and true. They remain at an even pitch every night, and the audience's reaction remains equally even. But in comedy, at each performance the actor faces a different kind of audience and a different set of audience reactions. He may think a line is sure-fire, only to be greeted by blank faces and silent hands. The applause, or lack of it, may tell him that he has played too broadly or not broadly enough; that he has overstepped himself or that he has held back.

Timing a Laugh

Knowing just how and when to connect with the audience on a humorous line or piece of business is called *timing*. This is an individual development that can come only with practice in understanding audience reaction and the type of comedy you are playing.

The actor who has perfect timing plays with the audience as a cat plays with a mouse. Each laugh is cumulative; the preceding giggle brings on the roar that follows. It seems to have been created for the express amusement of the particular audience that is watching.

The sound of a laugh rises to a peak, and before it can drop the actor picks it up with his next line. If he speaks his line when the laughter is at its peak, the audience, busy laughing at what has just happened, will not hear it. *The actor is talking through a laugh.* On the other hand, if he waits until the laughter has died out, the comic action will slow up to a walk, and he will lose his hold.

Timing laughs at the proper moment means that the new laugh must begin before the last laugh dies away.

At this trick, no comedian is more successful than Al Jolson. And he accomplishes it with such effortless ease that no one present can see the exquisite precision of his technique.

I remember a musical play in which Jolson was starred. In the second act, he did a specialty number that ran ten minutes. At the close of the songs and jokes, the audience applauded so vigorously that the show couldn't go on. The other actors were on the stage, ready to speak, but the audience clamored for more Jolson. Finally Al asked them if they didn't want to see the rest of the play. They continued to applaud. Then he asked, "Would you rather have me entertain you the rest of the evening?" They roared, "Yes!"

Very patiently, Mr. Jolson explained the continuity of the plot and the play's ending. Then, turning to the company, he said, "Good night, everybody! You can go home now!"

There followed the most inspired comic performance I have ever seen in the theater. For over an hour Mr. Jolson joked (mostly ad libbing) and talked about local events. He said, "You laugh as though you hadn't paid to get in. You know, the last town we were in . . . not so good. The audience sat on their hands and dared me to make them laugh. But you're different; you're with me."

His songs held them spellbound. He jumped from sentimental ballads to broad, comic songs. He had a hundred tricks to hold them; he tossed bright laughter over the footlights and brought it back again. His was humorous showmanship at its best

Laugh-getting Mediums

How did he do it?

Ask Mr. Jolson and other famous comedians how they win their laughter and applause and they'll tell you. By means of:

1. Shrewd facial expressions
2. Agile eyebrows
3. Vocal tricks
4. Perfect timing
5. Ironic inflections

EXAMPLES

1. *Facial Expressions*

Aristotle defined the comic element as "some defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive. The comic mask is ugly and distorted but does not cause pain."

It is true that most comedians have some defect in stature or face that makes them funny to look at.

Without make-up, W. C. Fields' facial expressions are laugh-provoking. One look at his large, bulbous nose, and the audience roars applause. Mr. Fields once said the funniest thing a comedian can do is not to do it. In other words, work the audience up to laughing expectancy and then abandon the idea. For instance,

William Lynn, playing the hypochondriac secretary in a recent revival of "Firefly," spied a pretty French servant girl. Leaning wistfully toward the girl, lips pursed, he said, "I'm going to kiss you [then he produced a bottle of pills] . . . after I take my pill."

Ed Wynn's face inspires laughter long before he starts to speak his rambling, nonsensical monologues in his uncontrolled, lisping voice.

2. *Comic Facial Expressions*

In the Behrman play, "No Time for Comedy," Lawrence Olivier, as the moody playwright husband, has become involved with another woman. The lady awaits him in the bar in the apartment house where he lives. He has decided against going away with her; he wants to stay with his wife. The telephone rings. Olivier sends a pleading, wistful look to his wife. Will she answer—get him out of the mess? The wife sits resolute. He can get himself out. The husband goes to the telephone . . . opens his mouth to talk . . . looks back at his wife, a helpless child . . . opens his mouth again . . . and the curtain goes down, leaving the audience to guess what he says.

3. *Agile Eyebrows*

In Chapter 6 (The Eyes) will be found directions for using the brows as well. For in comedy, there is no more useful weapon than the shrewd uplift of the eyebrow.

Whenever you think of the brow in action in comedy, you think of Eddie Cantor and his trick of working heavily marked brows above perennially surprised, busy eyes.

The sardonic eyebrows of John Barrymore run the gamut of acting along with the other well-cut features of the famous player. As a matter of fact, all the Barrymores have energetic brows. Whereas John lifts his brows, Ethel draws hers down over her deep-set eyes, and Lionel sets his in a straight line—each with superb comic effect.



Henry Travers as the comic old philosopher, Grandpa Vanderhof, in "You Can't Take It With You, gives the former grand duchess, Olga, a bit of advice. (Courtesy of Sam Harris.)

4. Vocal Tricks

Victor Moore has a faltering, apologetic, "excuse me for living" method of underscoring his voice; Helen Westley, her harsh, cackling laughter and sudden awesome return to dignity through vocal display. Fred Allen uses a dry Yankee humor, with an undercurrent of sharp, ironic wit beneath his twangy drawl. Eddie Cantor's method is an eager, please-like-me approach that seldom fails to draw.

EXAMPLE (VOCAL TRICK)

When flighty Fran Dodsworth bids good night to the sophisticated Mrs. Cortright, Fran expresses the hope that she will look as well as Mrs. Cortright when she reaches forty. Mrs. Cortright, aware that Fran is forty or more, counters, "My dear, I'm almost sure you will!"

. *Perfect Timing*

Ina Claire's light, sharp comedy attacks are built on her method of timing. Miss Claire gives a line a triple exposure. She looks back to what has just been said and looks forward to what is to come at the same time she is speaking the present line.

Billie Burke is an expert at timing. On analyzing the adorably dumb and fluttering woman whom she does so well, you will find Miss Burke using her voice, gestures, facial expressions, and quick trilling laugh to bring peals of laughter from the audience, no matter how unfunny the lines may be.

A comic invention in perfect timing that rarely fails to call forth a laugh is an expression of indifference immediately followed by quickened interest.

EXAMPLE

BOY: I want you to meet an old sweetheart of mine

GIRL: (*Jealous*) No, thanks, I don't want to meet *her*. I'm not at all interested. . . . *What's she like?*

6. *Ironic Inflections*

Lynn Fontanne's comedy suggests a deep, ironic inner amusement. She is secretly delighted. Her voice and laughter have a rich, throaty sound. Her method is never fluttery or fast-paced; it is leisurely and accurately timed.

On the other hand, Beatrice Lillie's light, high voice inspires laughter. And Patsy Kelly's rough comedy is put over by her funny shrill voice and quick sense of timing, which she learned in vaudeville.

EXAMPLE (IRONIC INFLECTION)

In Behrman's play, "No Time for Comedy," Katharine Cornell has offered to help her husband pack his luggage. He petulantly refuses. With the amiable warning to the woman he has chosen as wife number two, "Don't touch his things!" she exits. A second later she sticks her head through the door and repeats in a sharp, ironic voice, "Don't touch his things!"

Are You Laughing at Me or with Me?

This is a question every comedian should ask himself. If he is playing broad burlesque, slapstick, or satire, the audience will be laughing *at* him. But if he is playing character comedy in which the laughs arise from the frailties and mistakes of human beings, the audience, composed of human beings, will sympathize and laugh *with* him.

In character comedy the audience enjoys in retrospect what they remember about similar experiences. Through imagination they put themselves in the actor's place and feel with him. Hence the actor who undertakes character comedy must have a knowledge of people, their psychology, and philosophy. For all humorous situations and lines are patterned from human behavior.

The American brand of comedy is essentially sympathetic. It is not brilliant, caustic, or satirical so much as it is homely and tender. Such plays as "Ah, Wilderness," by Eugene O'Neill, "Big-Hearted Herbert," by Sophie Kerr, "Turn to the Right" and "Lightnin'," by Winchell Smith, "Another Language," by Rose Franken, "Pigs," by Anne Morrison, "Adam and Eva," by Guy Bolton, "As Husbands Go," by Rachel Crothers, and "Seventeen," by Booth Tarkington, are typical American plays. They show the American family not in a ridiculous or malicious manner but in a gently teasing way.

The budding poet, Richard, in "Ah, Wilderness," who worries his mother because he reads Swinburne and Omar Khayyam and annoys his father because he hates Capital, brings our laughter because we recognize in his pangs of youth some of our own. On the other hand, when Richard drinks too much because he can't get the girl of his choice, we sympathize with the problem of the parents.

Anyone who ever had a mother-in-law is inspired to laughter by the domineering Mrs. Hallam in "Another Language." The routine get-togethers of the family relatives, the rebellion of Stella, one daughter-in-law, who refuses to be molded into the Hallam pattern, are funny and at the same time pathetic. Even

as we laugh, we sympathize with the predicament of the young daughter-in-law who saw no reason why chrysanthemums should not be placed in an umbrella stand.

Laughter in Farce Playing

A farce is a play in which emphasis is placed on an exaggerated situation. The laughs come from the contrast between the characters and the situations that confront them. The more thoroughly the comedian becomes involved in the humorous situations of the play, the greater the fun. He is forever in hot water; try as he may, he cannot extricate himself. Indeed, the harder he tries, the more complicated becomes the tangle. And the greater the number of laughs.

Example: In "Three Men on a Horse," trouble begins early in the day for Irwin when his wife demands that he give her the money he has saved for a fishing trip in order that she may buy a new dress. To drown his sorrows, he goes to a bar; he drinks too much; he becomes associated with a race-track crowd. Instead of solving his problems, he adds to them until they mount in steady confusion and threaten to destroy him.

From the moment the curtain rises, a farce runs ahead like an express train. There are certain stations in which the train must pause for a split second; there are grades in which it must slow down. But where the track is straight and there are no stations, the train runs ahead at lightning speed straight to its destination. In playing farce, the actor is in control of the moving vehicle. His hand never leaves the throttle. It is his job to run the farce on schedule and to get there on time—which means no lost motion and no fumbling.

Pace in playing calls for pace in thinking. Not long ago I rehearsed a farce comedy in which the leading man was recruited from radio and vaudeville. His rating as a comedian was earned by his slow, witty dialogue; in farce comedy, unfortunately, this gift was lost.

The actor couldn't walk fast enough or talk fast enough to keep up with the pace of farce comedy. He couldn't synchronize his voice and body movements. He wanted to stand still and play farce—and that was not possible. No matter how fast I stepped up the action when the man was off stage, the moment he came on again, he slowed down the tempo to a walk. About farce playing, which is rapid treatment of a series of piled-up incidents, the actor had everything to learn.

Burlesque Laughter

Burlesque is a ludicrous imitation of real life, with emphasis on the ridiculous aspects of character.

Character mirrors nature. Caricature, or burlesque, is a travesty on nature. In the latter, the lowest form of comedy, a human being is held up to ridicule, often unkindly.

For instance, burlesque pokes fun at Henry, an undersized man, by letting his wife pick him up and carry him while dancing. Character comedy, on the other hand, lets Henry pile two telephone books on a chair to reach the cupboard where his tall hat and high-heeled shoes are kept.

In slapstick comedy, Henry is seriously up against it. The books will slide from under his feet, and everything on the shelf will tumble onto his head, rendering him unconscious.

In farce, Henry, the small man, is asked by the conductor on a train to pay half fare (situation interest).

In polite drawing-room comedy, one of the players will say to Henry, "Buck up, old man. Size isn't everything. Napoleon did pretty well, you know."

Burlesque does not always necessarily mean rowdy comedy. The exaggeration of any character trait can be termed caricature, or burlesque treatment, of the trait.

For instance, in "Personal Appearance," Gladys George's portrait of a motion picture star was nothing more than a burlesque of the popular conception of such a star. Her studied elegance, her self-pity, her sense of importance were all exaggeration of typical traits of a given type.

In "Kiss the Boys Goodbye," Helen Claire as Cindy Lou burlesqued the Southern damsel who, in her most harassed moments, never forgot to whisper to the men of the cast, "My, how strong you are!"

Margalo Gillmore as the other woman in "No Time for Comedy" gave a delicate burlesque treatment of the self-appointed patroness of misunderstood genius. In an overdramatic voice, she mocked her own efforts to help the young playwright.

Slapstick Comedy

Slapstick comedy is essentially cruel. It is an act of physical aggression. A man is hit over the head or kicked in the back. He receives a custard pie in his face, a pitcher of water down his neck, a slap on the ears.

When we of the audience laugh at slapstick, we are taking personal pleasure in the physical discomfort of someone else. We are seeing another human being get the worst of it, and we are enjoying it. The element of sympathy does not enter into our enjoyment.

This sadistic strain goes back to our childhood. A small boy pulls a dog's tail or slaps a playmate and laughs at the discomfort of his victim. As we grow older we control these tendencies to indulge in cruel tricks, but the desire remains in most of us. Thus, when we see a dignified professor hit on the nose with a snowball, we laugh heartily.

Slapstick comedy dates back to the sixteenth century, when the *commedia dell' arte*, a strolling band of players, improvised entertainment for the crowd. Since performers had no text, they were compelled to make up their parts as they went along. To get laughs, each actor had to depend on his own bag of tricks and inventive ability.

Facial expressions counted for nothing, since all players were masked. They had to rely on falls, swaggering and strutting and gesturing to put over their meaning. From this beginning grew modern slapstick methods.

Hokum

Hokum comedy is less crude in its methods than slapstick. It consists of a series of mildly comic inventions and slight gags.

For instance, the comedian has a piece of sticky flypaper. He sits on it; he tries to remove it; it sticks to his hands. He uses his other hand, and again it sticks. Finally, after trying everything else, he places the flypaper on the stage and steps on it. His hands are freed. He tries to walk, but he discovers it is still with him. So, with one mighty effort, he kicks his foot, and his shoe flies off stage, carrying the flypaper with it.

This is a sure-fire laugh getter.

As the same comedian turns his back to the audience, his coat is revealed with the back cut out to show his shirt and suspenders. More hokum, but good for a laugh.

Props of every description are used to produce hokum laughter.

There is the banana with a zipper. The real fruit is placed inside the false covering. When the actor zips open the banana and eats the fruit, the audience laughs.

A piece of rubber is substituted for the ham in a sandwich. The actor bites into it, and pulls the sandwich away from his mouth. It stretches and flies back and slaps him in the face. Again, sure-fire hokum.

The actor sits at a table with a piece of custard pie. He cuts the pie into long strips, then uses his knife to eat it. As he brings the strips to his lips, he goes into an expert balancing act.

You see a man place a bottle in his hip pocket. He sits on it; the bottle breaks. The man shows his discomfort by shaking his trouser legs to get rid of the liquid.

The greater his unhappiness, the louder the audience applause. The laugh is on the *other* fellow—and that's the secret of successful hokum.

Drawing-room Comedy

Drawing-room comedy is a comedy of manners with emphasis on witty lines. The plot is not so complicated as in farce, and there are fewer situations and less action.

The laughs, which rise from dialogue rather than from situation or character humor, are quieter; they are spaced less frequently than in farce.

Drawing-room comedy is essentially English. It dates back to 1775, when Richard Brinsley Sheridan produced "The Rivals" and, later, "The School for Scandal." In that period of elegant artificiality, real emotions were concealed beneath a hard, brilliant surface. Hence, the popularity of the brittle, terse talk of the drawing-room comedy.

For the purpose of comparison between drawing-room comedy of that day and of modern times, in which it is equally popular, I want you to read these quotations from "Fashionable Levities," an English comedy written in 1780, and "End of Summer," an American comedy by S. N. Behrman, written in 1935.

EXAMPLES

Scene from "Fashionable Levities,"

MR. ORDEAL

Hear me. . . . I consider myself an agent, bound to answer for the distribution of that wealth with which heaven has bless'd my industry. . . . The charge of avarice is more applicable to the spendthrift than the prudent, the spendthrift grasps at every man's property; yet no man is accounted avaricious who conforms to the custom of dissipation; though the spendthrift raises his rents, and starves his tenantry . . . borrows money and ruins his friend, or runs in debt, and makes bankrupts of his tradesmen, if he drives a carriage, keeps a train of servants, plays, drinks and plunges into vice, the world will call him a damn'd generous fellow. . . . I speak my mind. . . . That's my way.

MR. CHEAT

The widow has a considerable share of the *toujours gai* in her composition.

SIR BUZZARD

Too much to promise constancy, but then you old bachelors have such winning ways. . . . But, Colonel, keep a sentinel on my sister. . . . Time and position are two dangerous pioneers. The first moulders the cement by degrees, and the other saps the foundation.

Scene from "End of Summer," by S. N. Behrman¹

PAULA

I've decided that you are conventional and bourgeois. You're money-ridden.

WILL

Eleven dollars. They say a big income makes you conservative.

PAULA

I don't mean your money. I mean . . . my money. It's childish to let an artificial barrier like that stand between us. It's also childish to ignore it.

WILL

I don't ignore it. That's what worries me. I count on it. Already I find myself counting on it. I can't help it. Sitting and waiting in an office for some bigwig who won't see me or for some underling who won't see me, I think, "Why should I wait all day for this stuffed shirt?"

Ironical Comedy

Ironical comedy is comedy of understatement. It is usually employed when an actor wants to put another person in his place.

The speech of the actor signifies exactly the opposite of what he is thinking.

EXAMPLES OF IRONICAL INFLECTION

In "No Time for Comedy," Katharine Cornell, as the actress wife, dons a new hat, and asks her husband his opinion of it. His indifferent mumble brings forth her ironical lines, "Don't *overcome* me, please!"

Scene from "Idiot's Delight," by Robert E. Sherwood²

IRENE

Somewhere in that funny, music-hall soul of yours is the spirit of Leander, and Abelard, and Galahad. You give up everything . . . risk

¹ "End of Summer," by S. N. Behrman. Reprinted by courtesy of Random House.

² "Idiot's Delight," by Robert E. Sherwood, Charles Scribner's Sons.

your life . . . walk unafraid into the valley of the shadow . . . to aid and comfort a damsel in distress. Isn't that the truth?

HARRY

Yes . . . it's the truth . . . *plainly* and *simply* put.

IRENE

When I was a little girl my father used to engage Chaliapin to come often to our house. He taught me many songs.

HARRY

Chaliapin, eh? Your father spared no expense.

In inventing Cyrano de Bergerac, Rostand put his character in an ironic situation in order to arouse sympathy. Cyrano, despite his "plume," as he derisively called his nose, was the true poet who composed love letters for the handsome but dull Christian. The play is also an ironic commentary on the fact that women seldom see below the surface of a man's appearance.

Satire

Satire makes fun in a good-natured but unmalicious way. It employs both irony and caricature. Satire is destruction by laughter. Sentiment and sympathy are not called upon in a satirical play. The playwright and audience stand aside and laugh with cynical amusement at the antics of human behavior.

"Once in a Lifetime" is a satire on the background and habits of Hollywood moving picture people.

Wit

Wit is an intellectual practical joke—a treatment of truth by comic implications. It leads on the audience and then plays April Fool. It is often cruel and seldom sympathetic.

Wit tickles the intellect, whereas broad comedy, falls, tumbles, and trips, tickles the senses.

EXAMPLE OF WIT

Scene from "The Importance of Being Earnest," by Oscar Wilde

LADY BRACKNELL

Dear child . . . of course you know that Algernon has nothing but his debts to depend upon. But I do not approve of mercenary marriages. When I married Lord Bracknell I had no fortune of any kind. But I never dreamed for a moment of allowing that to stand in my way.

Naturally the audience expects the line to end, "Although I had nothing, Lord Bracknell married me!" But Oscar Wilde so twisted the line that it gives the ironic implication that the lady in question is out for a moneyed marriage.

Later in this play, Lady Bracknell has another line with the same brand of caustic humor: "Never speak disrespectfully of society, Algernon. Only people who can't get into it do that!"

In a play of wit that depends on lines for audience appreciation, there is a minimum amount of character interest. Since we all know that real people do not spout a constant stream of epigrams, it is apparent that the author is not giving a true characterization of anyone; he is simply taking intellectual jabs at human behavior. He is holding up his characters for polite ridicule instead of for sympathy.

In French comedies of this kind, the same method is used for injecting philosophy and social and political significance.

How to Get Laughs

Given laugh-inducing lines, almost any trained actor can get laughs. But to be able to produce laughs from an ordinary "straight" part is a test of his inventiveness.

The real comedian does not depend entirely on his lines. He can say, "Give me my hat, please," and throw his audience into an uproar of fun. His appeal is so sincere that the sympathy of his watchers goes out to him even though they know full well that he is "putting on an act" for them.

Of all the comedians who play seemingly "straight" scenes with quiet humor, Victor Moore is the most successful. His quality of fun is human and whimsical. He is so honest in his portrayal of ridiculous nonsense that at times he almost draws a tear.

Example: In "Of Thee I Sing," Mr. Moore's attempts to get a drink were pathetically humorous. In the hotel room, while glasses were passed to the various congressmen gathered there, the neglected Vice-president, Throttlebottom (Victor Moore), was forgotten. Dashing into the bathroom, the comedian returned with a bright-colored celluloid glass. As soon as he filled it, the President grabbed it from his hands.

Before long, the whole audience wanted to help Mr. Moore get a drink. In arousing laughter, he had also aroused sincere sympathy.

Pathos in Comedy

Pathos in comedy is compassionate humor; it is the delicate blending of a laugh and a tear. Charles Chaplin is the greatest exponent of the school of comedy that specializes in this effect. He is the eternal, fumbling but lovable boob whose mistakes you pity even as you laugh.

When he borrows a dress suit and the waiter spills soup down the front, we laugh, but we are sorry. When Chaplin stands on a plank, innocently catapults a brick into the crowd below and starts a riot, we laugh loudly. But when the crowd starts to chase him, we want to help him to escape.

Whimsical Humor

In whimsicality there is a childlike quality that appeals to the average adult audience. With its use, the actor can tell a joke that otherwise might offend.

Example: "Yesterday I picked up the most beautiful squirrel. It was sick and shivering. I put it under my coat close to me to make it warm. Today I had to bury my clothes."

Humor in the Unexpected

A miscarriage of events is always good for a laugh. The thing that should happen doesn't. You expect to sit down, but the chair folds beneath you. You tiptoe across the room so as not to disturb an invalid; you stub your toe and give forth a loud yell. You are careful to hang your coat on a rack, and, in so doing, you pull down a dozen coats.

To the audience these things are very funny; not so to the actor. Hence, the more serious the face of the actor and the greater his embarrassment the more prolonged the audience laughter.

Surprise is the keynote of comedy of this brand.

Comedy from the Misuse of Words

Since Sheridan invented the famous character Mrs. Malaprop, playwrights have employed the use of play on words to get comic effects. This form of humor offers a wide range of illustrations—from "Personal Appearance," in which the movie actress (Gladys George) went outdoors to "commute with herself," to the more exaggerated malapropisms of "The Rivals."

EXAMPLE

Scene from "The Rivals," by Richard Brinsley Sheridan

MRS. MALAPROP

Observe me, Sir Anthony. I would by no means wish a daughter of mine to be a progeny of learning; I don't think so much learning becomes a young woman: For instance, I would never let her meddle with Greek, or Hebrew, or Algebra, or simony, fluxions, or paradoxes, or such inflammatory branches of learning. . . . Neither would it be necessary for her to handle any of your mathematical, astronomical, diabolical instruments. . . . But, Sir Anthony, I would send her, at nine years old, to a boarding school in order to learn a little ingenuity and artifice. Then, sir, she should have a supercilious knowledge in accounts . . . and as she grew up, I would have her instructed in geometry that she might know something of the contagious countries. But above all, Sir Anthony, she should be mistress of orthodoxy, that she might not mis-

spell and mis-pronounce words so shamefully as girls usually do; and likewise that she might reprehend the true meaning of what she is saying. This, Sir Anthony, is what I would have a woman know; and I don't think there is a superstitious article in it. . . . There, sir, an attack upon my language! What do you think of that? An aspersion upon my parts of speech! Was ever such a brute! Sure, if I reprehend anything in this world, it is the use of my oracular tongue, and a nice derangement of epitaphs!

Laughs from Costume Effects

Clothes, which make the man, can usually make for laughter, too, if they are cleverly selected and properly worn.

Some years ago Fred Allen made his appearance in a Winter Garden production wearing an oversized Inverness coat and a brown derby hat several sizes too large for his head. To the audience he said, "I might look funny to you, but I'm a big man in my home town."

When the play, "Broadway," opened, the audience was vastly amused to see Lee Tracy, the hoofer, make a quick change before their eyes.

One of the funniest scenes in "Dodsworth" is that in the Ritz Hotel in which the fashionable Fran, in an old wrapper, smears cold cream on her face, while Sam, undressed for the night, parades about in his underwear.

In "Three Men on a Horse," the only way the race-track crowd can keep Irwin in the hotel is by taking away his trousers. Irwin wears old-fashioned long underwear, which increases the comic effect.

When Cindy Lou, the Southern belle of "Kiss the Boys Good-bye," makes her first appearance before the movie director whom she is trying to impress, the audience titters at her costume effect. True to type, she is dressed in crinoline and flounces, carries a parasol, and strums a guitar.

Trick Laughs

Comedians who depend on tricks to get their laughs are called "stunt" men, and of these Fred Stone is perhaps the most famous.

He started this form of comedy back in the days of "The Red Mill," when he rescued a girl from the windows of the mill by catching onto the mill wheel.

He carried on (even after an airplane accident broke almost every bone in his body) by playing stunts in a Shubert musical show called "Smiling Faces."

When Fred told me he had a stunt that would bring big laughs, I listened, a trifle worried. He was rigging up a trick airplane effect, costing in the neighborhood of ten thousand dollars.

The plane was so contrived that, although Stone appeared to be controlling it, a man was concealed inside the machine to whirl the propeller. The plane came on from the wings, headed downstage to the footlights, and stopped short. At the same time, a lever was pulled inside, the front part collapsed, and the tail of the plane rose in the air, giving the appearance of a fatal nose dive. Before making his exit, Stone went to the propeller to warm up the motor and then, accidentally, was caught onto it and whirled around.

A stunned silence in the audience, and then wild laughter when the hoax was realized.

Ed Wynn is another master of the comic trick.

In a "Passing Show" at the Winter Garden, he played in a sketch in which he tried to sell a dilapidated automobile. The machine was so wired that it could fall to pieces in a second and be scattered—fenders, running board, and tires—on the floor. But when a prospective customer appeared, the comedian whispered, "Get up, Tillie," pulled an invisible string, and the car pulled itself together and sat up.

Later, in a Ziegfeld show called "Simple Simon," Ed Wynn played an innocent pedestrian who became involved in a street scene. Two Italian balloon vendors carrying large bunches of balloons began to argue. One asked Wynn to hold his balloons, which the comedian did. As the argument waxed hotter, the second balloon merchant asked him to hold his balloons also. Wynn took them and, as he did so, was whisked out of sight. Mr. Ziegfeld discarded this wire trick as too dangerous, although Ed Wynn was willing to continue.

How to Laugh

One of the most difficult things for the new actor to learn is how to laugh naturally. Just try it—and you will see what I mean!

Laughter is a physical effort. If it isn't felt deeply, it becomes superficial or forced. When your sense of humor isn't aroused, it is next to impossible to produce hearty (and natural) laughter.

Example: Natural laughter is usually abrupt and disconnected in its action. In music, it might be called staccato. The laugh is cut off sharply. The sound we make is *ha-ha-ha-ha*.

When executed, each *ha* is a separate sound, which, if speeded up, becomes one continuous sound. This is accomplished effectively by short explosive manipulations of the diaphragm and breath.

Not all laughter is spontaneous. When mixed with thought, it often becomes a cackle (calculated laughter).

Age modifies the power and form of laughter. An elderly, thoughtful philosopher indulges in a low, deep chuckle. An ill-tempered spinster has a dry cackle. A giddy schoolgirl gives an uncontrollable giggle.

In other words, laughter is an individual thing that must be formed in keeping with character.

Variations of Laughter

(Practice each variation five times daily)

Titter

Guffaw

Roar

Cackle

Polite (forced) laughter

Trill of a light-brained woman

Snicker (sheepish embarrassment)

Snort

Sinister (gloating) laughter

Chuckle

Giggle

Hysterical (mixed with tears) laughter

Audience Laughter

Laughter response depends entirely on the listener's personal conception of fun gained from his background and education.

All comedians know there is safety in aiming at a rather low humor level. Slapstick and gag comedy are almost infallible in vaudeville, radio, and motion pictures. The witty lines of Coward, Lonsdale, and Sherwood would hardly appeal to the audience that prefers action and amusing sights to intellectual observations mouthed by actors in polite drawing-room plays. The average man or woman would rather see two or three men hit over the head in quick succession, as in the dormitory scene in "She Loves Me Not," than hear the lines Algernon speaks in Oscar Wilde's "The Importance of Being Earnest."

EXAMPLE

LADY BRACKNELL: I had crumpets with Lady Harbury, who seems to be living entirely for pleasure now.

ALGERNON: I hear her hair has turned quite gold from grief.

The most spontaneous of all laughter is the roar or guffaw (sometimes called the belly laugh). It is a sense or sight laugh; it is caused by a sight stimulus. The audience laughs without thinking.

We laugh when we see a man slip on a banana peel, but if we stopped to think that he might be hurt seriously, our fun would be spoiled.

In burlesque, slapstick, and farce, we find this kind of hearty laughter.

A satire such as "Once in a Lifetime," in which a class of society is held up for good-natured ridicule, brings amused titters. The audience feels slightly superior to the characters in the play.

Risqué stories and allusions to sex or mention of subjects not often spoken of in polite society bring shamed laughter, preceded by a slight gasp of embarrassment and shock.

Such laughter is also caused by too accurate a character portrait, which makes the people in the audience think, "My goodness, am *I* like that?"

When the audience side with the character who is speaking an ironic line (or is involved in an ironic situation) they are laughing *with him*, not *at him*. Such ironic laughter is not spontaneous as a rule, since it is mixed with thought.

Tears in Tragedy

In dramatic tragedy, the actor commands the sympathy of his audience. They share with him a common problem or grief. When sorrow is most profound, they weep with him; when the problem is solved, they rejoice. In the few brief hours in which tragedy is enacted, the audience is carried into another world, and it is in these tense dramatic moments that the actor is given his greatest chance to portray realistically the tragedy that must come to all at some time in real life.

In dramas of emotion, where grief or sorrow is expressed by tears, the burden is usually placed upon the shoulders of the feminine members of the cast. Crying, as a rule, shows lack of restraint or emotional weakness, but this does not mean that giving vent to feelings in an uninhibited manner shows lack of courage. In many fine plays, strong men have wept. The trick, whether the weeper is a man or a woman, is to achieve an effect of sincerity. The weeping must sound to the audience as though the actor *felt every tear*.

The sound of crying is in itself elemental. It springs from pain and hurt. But when we cry on the stage, the act becomes mechanical, and therefore we must have a technique of crying in order to simulate tears.

Here, if ever, the actor must guard against overacting. Up to a point, he must *feel* his grief, and then, without showing the change, he must back his emotion with tone support. He must watch his voice lest it become too high and shrill. He must avoid "ham" behavior.

Crying has rhythm. In a crisis, the first reaction of an individual is stunned silence. The mind does not immediately grasp the situation. Then, as reason returns, the sobs start, low and quiet at first, then increasing in sound as grief increases, and, finally, after reaching a crest, subsiding into low, broken sobs.

Crying and Weeping

There is a difference between crying and weeping: Crying is a noisy and uncontrolled sound. Weeping is a subdued, restrained form of revealing grief, almost soundless, and surer to create sympathy.

A sigh, followed by a slight heave of the chest and shoulders, leads the actor into a natural means of displaying grief through weeping. If his facial expressions are true to life, his interpretation will make the scene realistic and vital. The situation that has caused his grief is known to the audience; there is no need for him to pound it in by violent sobbing. If he *looks his sorrow*, the audience will sorrow with him.

On the other hand, loud crying may spoil the tragic effect. In the jargon of the theater, "the sniff and heave effect"—one or two short intakes of breath through the mouth and nose, accompanied by a slight heave of the chest and shoulders—is more productive of sympathy than a loud bawl. If this device is followed by a low moan or sob, the scene can be very moving.

Fright and Anger Crying

A noisy form of crying is sometimes used to express fright. This usually runs into hysteria, thereby building the scene to a climax. A fit of anger calls for the same treatment.

Example: Someone dear to you is leaving you. You want to accompany him; he refuses to take you. You cry, "Don't leave me!" and burst into a fit of tears. As your friend takes you in hand and tries to comfort you, the tears subside. You sob; you snifle. Then you recover. But the recovery is gradual.

EXAMPLE OF HYSTERICAL TEARS
AND LAUGHTER*Scene from "My Lady's Dress," by Edward Knoblock¹*

Anita, the model, looks in horror at the body of Jacquelin, the couturier, whom she has just stabbed, and then breaks into hysterics.

ANITA: Why don't you kick! You've kicked your way up. You said there were still a few good kicks left in those legs of yours. Well . . . why don't you . . . why don't . . . (*She begins to scream hysterically*) Ah! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ah! (*The telephone rings*) Ah! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ah!

EXAMPLE OF CRYING FROM HAPPINESS

Scene from "Smilin' Through," by Allan Langdon Martin²

Kenneth has just come back from the war and takes Kathleen by surprise.

KATHLEEN

Ken! . . . oh, Ken . . . !

KENNETH

How are you, Kathleen?

KATHLEEN

Oh, Ken! You're back. . . . I think I'm going to faint. . . . No, I'm not. . . . I'm going to cry. . . . (*She puts out a trembling hand and pets his sleeve*)

KENNETH

Oh, come, Kathleen. . . . I'm not worth a single tear. (*Kathleen just laughs and cries with happiness*) Awfully jolly to see you, though. You're looking very fit.

¹ "My Lady's Dress," by Edward Knoblock. Copyright, 1911, 1916, by Edward, Knoblock. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of Samuel French.

² "Smilin' Through," by Allan Langdon Martin. Copyright, 1924, by Samuel French. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of Samuel French.

KATHLEEN

Am I? Oh, Kenneth . . . you've come back . . . and you're alive! Just let me look at you! Oh, you've been so ill, dear, haven't you? You're a little pale, you know . . . and I'm keeping you standing. . . . Sit down . . . sit down. . . . (*She urges him to a chair*) If I could stop crying for a single second I could see you better! (*She laughs again*)

Don't Whine!

Nothing is so annoying as to have to listen to an actor as he whines a whole speech. His petulant bleating defeats its own purpose; he creates exactly the opposite of the effect desired.

If the same speech is read quietly, interrupted here and there with a sob or a moan, it may have sympathetic appeal. To avoid this form of whining, the lines should be read through without attempting to reveal sorrow through tears. Then, when the actor has the emotional effect of the situation well in hand, he should ask himself how he would react to a real-life tragedy of the same kind. Later he can interpolate the sobs, moans, and fits of weeping at the exact spots where he feels profound emotions.

The greatest compliment that can be paid a tragedy actor is to say: his sorrow is not tinged with self-pity. Controlled emotional intensity is the secret of all tragic acting—not a flow of easy, noisy tears.

How to Study a Part

FOR each part she plays, Jane Cowl has a script of her own, at least twice as long as the author's original script. The additions on Miss Cowl's personal script contain *all the things the character is thinking while the actress is speaking the lines*.

This is Jane Cowl's own recipe for keeping the interpretation of her stage character fresh and clear in her mind. And a very good plan it is, too. By thinking in terms of what her character is thinking, the movements of the actress are automatically directed into the most artistic and powerful channels of expression.

Each actor has his own method of studying a part, but under each plan of attack is the same underlying principle: *you must understand the nature of the character you are playing* as well as that of the other characters in the play. Some call this "sensing a part," but to me that expression sounds a little arty and obscure. I prefer to call it "getting a perspective on a part." Imagine yourself standing in the distance and watching the character *living*, not acting the various scenes of the play, and you'll have a good start on understanding the nature of the person you are trying to interpret.

Next, take up in turn these points about the character:

1. Age
2. Background

3. Period
4. Locale
5. Philosophy
6. Physical mannerisms
7. Speech
8. Psychology

EXAMPLE

For the purpose of analysis, I have selected two well-known parts, that of Dodsworth, as played by Walter Huston in the play of the same name by Sidney Howard, and Irwin, the timid young husband, in "Three Men on a Horse."

DODSWORTH

Age: Late forties.

Background: A leader; self-made businessman and proud of it.

Period: Today.

Locale: Zenith, a small Middle Western manufacturing town, which Dodsworth has built from a village.

Philosophy: He is tolerant, human, devoted to his wife and family. Sentimental, has rigid moral code both in business and in personal life.

Physical mannerisms: Is fond of his pipe and easy slippers; neat, conservative, small-town dresser.

Speech: Direct and forceful. He says what he means and says it straight from the shoulder. Socially, he is still a businessman.

Psychology: With all his success, he is spiritually restless, a dreamer. He is convinced that life must hold something more than making money. He has a strong sense of curiosity about the other fellow.

IRWIN

Age: About thirty.

Background: Writes sentimental verse for greeting cards, is pleased with his job, and wouldn't think of asking for a raise.

Period: Today.



Young Martin Gunther (Fredric March) joyfully greets his immigrant wife, Irma (Florence Eldridge), and their two children at Ellis Island in the play "The American Way," by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart. Costumes, props (luggage, gold wedding ring on Mr. March's left hand), make-up (hairdress) all contribute to the characterization. (Courtesy of Sam Harris and Max Gordon.)

Locale: He is one of the thousands of commuters from Suburbia.

Philosophy: Be good to your wife, and respect the boss. Never be late to work. Save your money, and don't go into debt.

Physical mannerisms: He is a little man, both physically and spiritually. He would wipe his feet on the doormat, stoke the furnace, and empty the garbage pails.

Speech: Shy, hesitant, soft-spoken. He wouldn't venture an opinion on anything.

Psychology: Gets a harmless pleasure in playing the races on paper only. Actually to bet would never occur to him.

There are two ways to study a part: from the outside and from the inside.

The actor who has merely an outward conception of a character sees him in physical terms: mechanical actions, movements, mannerisms, speech, and costumes. If he is playing Don Juan, he says, "I'll play him broad. I'll make this sweeping gesture to the left and that to the right. I'll flaunt a flowing cape and a sword."

The actor sees the whole character in terms of movement. The inner emotional side of the character he doesn't see at all. Or he trusts to luck that the inner development will grow through rehearsal and playing.

In the second plan, that of studying a part from the inside, the actor takes his character apart. He asks himself: What manner of man is he anyway? How does he feel? The actor isn't so much interested in *what the character does* as *why he does it*. If the character is mean and grasping, the actor tries to discover why he got that way. If he is mellow and tolerant, the actor seeks the source of his emotional stability and works on it in his portrayal. Each gesture that the actor selects must be analyzed. He convinces himself that the gesture is the logical one for the character to make. Once his concept is formed, he sticks to it. If he feels that his portrayal is true to character, as he sees the man, he makes it his own. By this means, the actor builds solid reality.

Type Casting

Sometimes, at the outset of his career, an actor is chosen for a part because his looks suggest the character. A lucky break, it would seem, but actually it is the worst thing that can happen to him from the standpoint of progress. *Type casting is the phrase for it. You are literally playing yourself. In doing so, all your personal reactions come into play and influence your character interpretation, whereas you are supposed to be acting, interpreting a character*

probably foreign in thought, belief, mannerisms, to yourself. Type casting is a challenge to neither your artistic ability nor your creative imagination.

By the use of imagination, which is the true heart of acting, you project yourself into the character's background and mind. If you feel the character, the right gestures and vocal inflections will come to you naturally. If you are playing a queen, you will first imagine the inner workings of a queen's mind, and automatically you will find yourself walking and talking in a queenly manner.

Ziegfeld picked many of his most famous beauties from the more modest walks of life. These girls were ex-waitresses, shop girls, and office workers. Criticized during an audition for choosing a girl who was shabbily dressed, he said, "But she *feels* beautiful." He knew that her personal satisfaction and delight at being chosen as a Ziegfeld girl would automatically enhance her charm and poise and give her the personal assurance needed to wear beautiful clothes. In other words, he was dressing her from "the inside" instead of putting costumes on a clotheshorse who would lend nothing of herself.

The First Reading of a Play

In a semicircle of kitchen chairs in the center of the stage, the company is assembled for a first reading of the play. As yet the parts have not been assigned. They are neatly stacked on the director's table beside his script. With the exception of the star, who has read the script, no one else knows exactly how long his part is to be.

As each member of the company steps up to the director's table, his face registers joy or sorrow, depending entirely on the *size of the part*. I've seen a young actor droop in despair as he feels the slim pages of lines accorded him, and another almost throw his hat in the air at what he feels to be "a fat part." *Neither has the good sense to know that some of the greatest roles in the history of the stage have been short on lines but long on dramatic strength and character interpretation.* The audience doesn't care much about the

length of time an actor is on the stage; it is interested primarily in what he does while he is there.

Once the part is in your hand, you listen to the director's explanation of the story. This conference on story, plot, and character delineation is given before actual rehearsals start. Even in a stock company, where a new play is produced each week, this custom of giving everyone in the company a complete understanding of the whole play is followed.

If everything isn't clear to you, ask questions! You won't be fired for admitting ignorance at this point, but you may lose your job later on if you fail to gain a complete understanding of what the playwright and director have in mind about the production.

Learning a Part

How shall I learn my lines? the beginner wants to know.

As he shuffles through page after page of script, memorizing the speeches seems a mammoth task. His first impulse is to learn by rote; that is, study and recite each speech, one after another, until he has memorized the entire part.

To me this mechanical form of study has never seemed the right one. I always advise young actors to forget memory for a time and study the personal thoughts and responses that come through reading the words.

Take one scene at a time. Analyze the meaning of the words. Ask yourself, what thought comes to me as I read?

EXAMPLE¹

In Maeterlinck's play "Monna Vanna," Monna Vanna, wife of the commander of the besieged garrison at Pisa, goes to the tent of Princivalle, the barbarian leader of the army of Florence, to beg for food for her people. There follows the impassioned love confession of Princivalle to Monna Vanna.

PRINCIVALLE: Oh, Vanna, my Vanna . . . for, I, too, used to call you thus. . . . Now I tremble as I speak your name. . . . It has so

¹ From "Monna Vanna," by Maurice Maeterlinck. Used by permission of Dodd, Mead & Company, Inc., and George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.

long remained trebly sealed in my heart that it cannot escape without breaking its prison. . . . Indeed, it is my heart; it is all I have. In each one of its syllables lies all my life; and as I pronounce them I feel my life flow from me.

What is your first reaction to this speech?

Isn't it appreciation of Princiville's humility in the face of his lady? Great leader that he is, he bows his head in worship before her beauty and innocence. *Humility*, then, is a key to the character interpretation.

What next? Princiville is *excited* and *exuberantly happy*. His secret love has long lain in his heart; now he is permitted to speak.

Third, he is something of a *poet*. His speech (or, rather, the one the playwright gives him) is well expressed; he is a man of considerable culture. This speech will fasten itself in your mind. You will not soon forget it. . . . And so on. If you will examine each line of action and speech given your characters, you will find a new aspect of thought to be developed, and at the same time you will learn the part.

The thought thus captured seldom leaves you. In fact, you'll be surprised to find that through this kind of study you've actually memorized the lines. You've made them your own in reverie. Later, if you dry up in the middle of a scene and forget your lines, your understanding of the general trend of the scene is so clear that you are able to carry on. You may even ad lib conversation until your memory comes back to you. (Ad libbing is interpolated speech invented by the actor; often it has no direct connection with the author's text.)

Example: An actor jumped into a difficult part with too few rehearsals. Unfamiliar with the situation and plot, he was clever enough to do a good job until it was time for another character—a doctor—to come on. The doctor missed his entrance cue, leaving the unrehearsed actor alone on the stage. Uncertain as to what action followed, the actor finished his lines and walked off the stage, leaving it bare (and the audience puzzled).

Had he been quick enough, he might have saved the situation by walking to the entrance and, through some form of ad libbing, reminding the doctor, who was engaged in conversation with actors off stage, that he should be on.

Instead, the stage was left cold until the doctor came on, looked around in bewildered fashion and ad libbed: "Where is everyone? Jones . . . Jones . . ." until the new man came on again.

I'm not suggesting that you try to ad lib or "wing" a part. Far from it. Each line in your part has a cue of three words printed above it, and that is the cue for you to learn. The cue is the last three words in the speech that precedes yours. Study the cue along with your own line. The other players will do likewise. Each player waits for his cue. Naturally any ad libbing will throw the performance out of kilter.

The Memory Process

Read the part through many times from cover to cover. Then, when you are thoroughly familiar with it, write the cues on a piece of paper and try to recite the lines that belong with them.

Committing a part to memory is a purely mechanical process that requires no other capacity than ability to memorize printed lines. It is at no time the test of one's artistic ability. A careless and incompetent actor may have an accurate magpie memory.

It isn't what we put in our minds but how we put it there that enables us to bring back knowledge when we need it. If the mind is attentive, the idea will enter, but it will not stick unless it associates itself with some other idea. When one of these ideas is recalled, it will suggest the other. For instance, if, in your part, you have the line, "I think I'll close the windows and build a fire," the idea conveys the thought that you are cold. This line will not only provide you with physical reaction but also give you two separate pieces of acting business. Both the words "close" and "build" suggest action.

The intelligent way to learn a part is to study the lines for their ideas and meaning. Read the part a few times. Think of the mean-

ing behind each sentence. Take a page at a time until you understand the first scene. Then go to the next.

As the play is staged, you will associate each thought with the acting business. If you have a stage cross on a certain line, the move is associated with the line. When you associate the mechanical business with the thoughts and lines, it is the quickest and surest method of study.

Always have a pencil at your rehearsal and carefully mark your part. Incorporate every piece of business regardless of how trivial it may seem to you at the time. Then, when you study your part at home, *be sure that the moves and business all coordinate.*

Example: In a scene in "First Lady"¹ a committee has come to his home to propose that Carter Hibbard, Supreme Court Justice, be nominated as President of the United States. The discussion gets around to the justice's delicate stomach. At this point his wife, gathering up the bottle of pills on the desk, says to him, "Darling, you mustn't forget your tablets!" To the others, "You know, if I don't look after him he doesn't do a thing for himself!" She shakes a handful of the tablets out of the bottle. "Just a great big baby, really!" The others look on in worshipful admiration as the curtain falls.

Learning lines is only part of the task of the beginning actor. Frequently he must learn to play an instrument, to sing, to dance, to fence, to perform some real-life bit that is not a part of his natural bag of tricks.

Alfred Lunt had to learn to play the piano and saxophone for "Clarence"; for Noel Coward's "Point Valaine," the accordion. In "Idiot's Delight," he executed some tricky dance steps.

Near the end of the New York run of "Show Boat," I faced the problem of finding an actress to play Magnolia in the road company. It wasn't an easy part to fill. The actress must be a trained singer, a good dramatic actress, young enough to play a very young

¹ "First Lady," by Katherine Dayton and George S. Kaufman. Reprinted by courtesy of Random House.

girl in the opening and skilled enough to play later a married woman and mother and, eventually, a very old woman. She must dance a little, and be able to accompany herself on the guitar.

Of all the actresses I tried out, Irene Dunne seemed the most promising. I rehearsed her and told her to study the part.

In the fall, when the company was assembled for the road, Miss Dunne was sent for. In four months, not only was she letter-perfect in the part of Magnolia, but she could sing the songs, play the guitar, and had worked out two dance routines. She was signed for the part and, after two weeks' rehearsals, opened in Boston, a decided hit.

Be prepared, then, to learn anything that is asked of you, from figure ice skating to waiting on table.

First Rehearsal

To every young player, the first rehearsal is a trying ordeal. He arrives in a state of nervous excitement. He feels that in order to be heard, he must speak in a loud voice. Now, it is true that he must be heard, but at the same time he must give an intelligent reading of the part, and that doesn't mean shouting.

Take it easy!

Don't try to hang your hat on every inflection of your voice. Rather, extend the sound of the word. Carry it along a step or two.

To give a word a simple inflection, just imagine it is a quarter note in music. Then change it to a whole note. A whole note is sustained; the quarter note is clipped and short.

Say the word "love." Say it briskly with a clipped accent; then slowly. Hold on to it.

Example: "I would love to go along with you [quarter note]."

"Love . . . that is the magic word the poets sing about [whole note]."

Technique Consciousness

The modern theater preaches naturalism and realism. You will hear, "Be natural!" as long as you are associated with the theater.



In the sentimental Golden Wedding scene in "The American Way," Martin and Irma Gunther tenderly celebrate their fiftieth year of happy marriage. Costume, posture, make-up contribute to the illusion of old age in these fine characterizations. (Courtesy of Sam Harris and Max Gordon.)

I heard it when I entered the theater twenty-five years ago. It is still the slogan. You can't and won't be able to avoid it. ***Be natural.*** What they really are trying to say is, ***don't be technique conscious.*** You can't be natural on the stage without technique. That is what it is for—to make people appear at ease.

At the first rehearsals, read your part as though you were in your own home in conversation with a group of friends. Make your speech clear and distinct. Of course, if you used the same

easy, conversational style during a performance, you would not be heard beyond the fifth row; yet this is the right way to study a part. It will develop a simple, natural style. It is necessary to have a certain amount of emphasis in order to give speech variety and color. But this is achieved by thinking and feeling, not by yelling.

As you become familiar with the lines, you will increase the volume of voice just a little each day. It should be so slight that no one but yourself is aware of it. This gradual development will not change your manner of speaking. It remains your own natural style. You have simply increased the volume of tone.

Stage Fright

I have seen intelligent and well-balanced actors and actresses go completely to pieces when they were given a line to read. So confused were they that they could not even hold the part in their hands, much less read it.

Stage fright? Not always. Sometimes the actor feels nothing more than a sense of personal inadequacy when he is asked to act in the presence of others. This condition is by no means hopeless; it may mean that the victim of sudden fright is a fine and sensitive artist. It also shows that he has proper respect for his job. A smug self-satisfied beginner is not good theatrical material.

Directors recognize the symptoms of stage fright and know how to deal with them. Often a second reading in a quiet spot, with no interruptions, and a sympathetic word or two from the director before the reading starts will cure the trouble.

If you are subject to these spells of terror, you'll have to learn to adjust them. Every true performer knows moments of self-doubt; it's part of the artistic temperament. Katharine Cornell has admitted that, despite several weeks of study of a new role, she is always very bad at the first few rehearsals. She feels that she has lost all sense of the part. But that is only temporary; she soon gets over it.

When Miss Cornell returns to the theater after a vacation (her last ran into almost two years), she finds herself wondering whether she can act at all. So detached has she become that the

life behind the footlights seems another world to her. She is very pessimistic about her ability to adjust to it.

But Guthrie McClintic, her husband-director, knows all about that. After the first few rocky rehearsals, Miss Cornell forgets her fears and steps magnificently into her stride as an actress.

Not so fortunate was the original experience of Katharine Hepburn.

When she was in Bryn Mawr, rehearsing a freshman college play, she said to the girl who stood next to her at rehearsals, "If I could only be an actress!" The girl looked Miss Hepburn up and down and said, "An actress! You?"

Katharine Hepburn, painfully shy, shriveled under the scorn of her classmate. She vowed to herself that she'd never mention her desire to be an actress to anyone—but, just the same, she would be an actress.

Some years later, after conscientious training, Miss Hepburn got her first New York part—a minor role in "The Big Pond." She was fired after the first performance. Stark terror shook her. All her worse faults came out. Before anyone else would believe in her, Miss Hepburn had to recover her belief in herself.

In "The Lake" she suffered another major disaster. If you want to know what Katharine Hepburn is made of, ask her about "The Lake."

"I just fell apart on the opening night," is her description of what happened. "I went to pieces in a crisis. I froze in my tracks; I couldn't do a thing."

No one knows just what went on in Miss Hepburn's belief in herself during the years that she was away from the theater. But when she came back in "The Philadelphia Story," she had found herself.

"I wasn't so horribly nervous at our opening," she said triumphantly. "At least not like that night in 'The Lake.'"

At last Katharine Hepburn was her own woman!

Concentration

The theater is the schoolroom to which the young actor goes to study and gain knowledge. It is probably the only schoolroom in

the world where theory and practice are combined. As he learns the intricacies of his profession, the beginner has a chance to watch experienced players going through the same performance in which he is trying to perfect himself.

This is especially true of rehearsals in which all the little technical tricks of acting are developed. The beginner can watch the old-timer use his hands to put over a bit of business. He can compare this technique with the technique that he has been taught. He doesn't have to go out front to do this; he can sit at the side, out of the way, where he will be able to see and hear everything. He will also be ready for his next entrance.

An entrance cue is important, so always be ready to pick it up. There are off stage cues that the actors on stage depend upon in order to carry on their dialogue. If the cue is not given, there is a stage wait. Don't get the reputation of being careless at rehearsals. Pick up your cues on stage and off stage instantly. Make a habit of doing this. If you pick up cues at rehearsal, you won't miss them at a performance. Missing a cue usually shows a mental indifference in the actor and breaks the continuity of the play. So pick up your cues!

The important thing is to concentrate on your job. Backstage life can be a social affair or it can be straight business. For the first year at least, the young actor should make it business strictly. He can't afford to pick up his mail, saunter in with a brief "hello," and go on chatting with some fellow actor about everything from economic problems to the latest tidbit of the gossip columns.

He must concentrate on what is going on about him. Working steadily in the theater will prove so absorbing that he'll soon forget there is any life outside.

The Director Is Your Friend

When you get up in front of the director, don't shake like a model T Ford. The chances are he's more eager for you to succeed than you can possibly be. It will save him the trouble of trying out someone else for the part. And he may be human enough to want to develop raw material if he can.

Think of the director as a kind, wise friend. Listen to what he has to say; don't argue. Don't try to defend yourself when you make mistakes. And don't sulk.

If you are energetic and on the job, he'll be watching you, whether or not you know it.

My introduction to Fred Astaire came when I was sent to rehearse a vaudeville act in which he worked with his sister, Adele. The big finish to the turn was an extremely difficult eccentric exit step in which Fred and Adele hopped off stage, giving the audience the impression that they were falling. As they came off, three stage hands were stationed in the wings to catch them.

During rehearsals, I was the first one in the theater and the last to leave. But I always had company. Whenever I heard a sound something like that of a giant woodpecker, I knew Fred Astaire was somewhere in a corner working out a new ankle twister.

Fred was never entirely satisfied with his act. Long after he opened, he would still insist on extra rehearsals. No step was ever too hard to tackle; the more complex, the greater the challenge to him. This eagerness for perfection and his good nature were infectious; everyone around him wanted to work, too. These qualities, combined with his inventive genius, took him to the top of his profession.

Fifteen years later in the Ziegfeld production "Smiles," the stars, Astaire and Marilyn Miller, had danced their way to fame, but Fred was still calling for special rehearsals. The best effort could be a little better, he insisted. Marilyn, too, had never stopped practicing. Before the lights were turned on backstage, she was hanging onto a piece of scenery, going through her ballet lifts and kicks.

Would there were more actors like Marilyn Miller and Fred Astaire!

The Art of Make-up

MAKE-UP reveals the outward physical signs of the character you are portraying just as surely as expression reveals the physical signs of inside feeling. Therefore, it is just as important for the actor to produce a character striking in appearance as it is to select action that will mirror the emotional side of the character part.

In order to do this, the beginner in the theater must master the intricacies of make-up, a study that is fascinating and endless. Needless to say, a knowledge of the rudiments of painting, the mixing of pigments and blending of colors will be of value to the student. The relation of the arts, one to the other, is obvious.

When an artist paints a portrait from life, he tries to copy nature in the most minute detail. When the portrait is finished, if he has done credit to his subject, the character of the sitter shines forth from the canvas. If the individual qualities of the subject are missing, the painter has failed, no matter how artistic the result.

It is much the same with the actor. When he paints the portrait of his character on his face, he must use nature as his model. True, he may have to call on imagination for some of the details, but in the main the picture he is striving for will be consistent with the character he is portraying. As for his own face, the actor can well



By the expert use of putty, Raymond Massey changes the contour of his own nose to that of Lincoln's in the play "Abe Lincoln in Illinois," by Robert E. Sherwood. (Courtesy of Playwrights' Co.)

forget it, no matter how pleasing it may be to himself or to others. He must look his part as well as play it.

Along with a knowledge of painting, the actor often finds himself a sculptor as well. Raymond Massey, who played Lincoln in the Playwrights' Company production of "Abe Lincoln in Illinois," had to be a sculptor to play the part. Working from portraits and drawings of Lincoln, Mr. Massey used nose putty instead of the shaped soft rubber nose affected by most portrayals



Nose remodeled, wig adjusted, Mr. Massey, with the aid of a dark liner, accents the wrinkles around the eyes and forehead.

of the nation's hero. So perfect was the actor's arrangement that he learned to put on the spirit gum, the putty, shape the nose, and make it up in less than twenty minutes. The warts on his face were made of wax. Since the character grew older as the play advanced, the nose had to be changed between scenes.

The most difficult nose make-up in the theater belongs to the character Falstaff. The same season Raymond Massey was playing Abe Lincoln, Maurice Evans was working hard putting on

Falstaff's enormous proboscis. So elaborate was the job that Mr. Evans did not take it off on matinee days.

The actor used three strips of adhesive tape, with nostrils cut out of the one that came down to the bridge of his nose and tucked under the tip. He mounted two plaster bumps on the tape and then began to work with the nose putty. It had to be a good stout job of make-up to allow for rolling around the stage in the battle of Shrewsbury, where Falstaff is in danger of being stepped on by extras. Mr. Evans made the remark that his nose prevented him from ham acting. "I didn't dare overact," he said. "My nose might fall off at the end of a wave of the arm."

Students of make-up will remember another remarkable nose belonging to the character of Frank Harris, in the production "Oscar Wilde." Harold Young, the actor, wore the retroussé affair, effected by a rubber nose instead of putty. Before he arrived at a satisfactory nose, Mr. Young tried everything from cardboard to papier-mâché. Finally one of the Senz brothers modeled the nose from a drawing of Frank Harris. Rubber noses can be pushed, twisted, and given a hearty pull without being dislodged.

So successful was Sanford Meisner's Semitic nose make-up in the revival of "Awake and Sing" (the actor's own nose has Grecian purity of line) that Clifford Odets wrote a line in the play, "Why, it's as plain as the nose on your face!"

But whatever the medium of make-up, wax, putty, papier-mâché, the nose must be the nose of the character himself, and that's where the individual work comes in. *There's a sharp distinction between make-up and disguise. With the help of wigs, whiskers, and grease paint, almost anyone with professional experience can hide his own identity. A real actor, on the other hand, must not only conceal his identity but present the identity of another, and this means an understanding of the effect of color blending, shadings, and the correct use of wigs and beards. And, most important of all, an understanding of the character he is portraying. Before you attempt any make-up, turn the part over and over in your mind, until you can see an actual physical picture of the*

character. Use the plan of character analysis suggested in Chapter 12 (How to Study a Part).

Make-up Requirements

What make-up shall I keep on hand? the young actor asks me.

Professionally speaking, in these days of one part a season, very little make-up material is required. But the beginning student of the art of make-up will save time and energy if he supplies himself with as elaborate a set of make-up as was kept by the old-time stock actor whose program compelled him to keep on hand enough make-up to appear in any part for which he might be unexpectedly cast. He should always buy the best quality of make-up; in the end he will find that it is less expensive than an inferior brand.

A straight juvenile make-up would call for this material:

1. One box of cold cream
2. One tube of flesh-colored grease paint, medium shade
3. One stick of red grease paint
4. One box of medium powder
5. One large powder puff
6. One baby brush
7. One small stick of black or brown grease paint
8. Two orange sticks
9. One small box of mascara
10. One small can of wet lip rouge
11. One small box of dry rouge
12. One rabbit's foot

So many kinds of good grease paint are manufactured today that choice becomes a matter of personal taste. Grease paint is put up in jars, sticks, liquid form, and tubes. Tubes are the simplest to use and the most popular. If the part you are going to play is that of a young, strong, and virile man, use flesh paint of a ruddy, healthy hue for a base. On the other hand, if the character is an ascetic one, such as a poet, the flesh or base will be lighter in color.

Youth on the stage does not require a heavy grease paint make-up. A more natural effect is produced when make-up is used sparingly. The function of straight make-up is to intensify natural

color, which fades under strong lights. It is only when the actor reaches middle age and finds himself still playing youthful parts that he resorts to the heavy make-up to cover up the little telltale lines. For grease paint can be used to eradicate wrinkles as well as make them.

A new make-up called "panchromatic," perfected by the moving pictures, is sometimes used on the stage. All the greases, rouge, powder, and liners contain various shades of tan. Care must be taken in applying this make-up to get it perfectly smooth, for it cannot be patched. Panchromatic is also being used for television make-up.

How to Apply Make-up

Before you attempt any actual make-up, it would be well for you to memorize these rules:

1. Apply a small quantity of cold cream to the face, neck, and ears.
2. Remove the cold cream with a towel or a piece of soft cheesecloth.
3. See that your skin is absolutely dry. Enough cream will remain to fill the pores—the reason for its application.
4. Apply the grease paint, which is the foundation, or base.
5. Spread the flesh color uniformly and work gently, covering the face, neck, and ears.
6. When the foundation is even and perfectly smooth, begin to apply the red paint. Blend high on the cheekbones and graduate down the sides of the cheeks to mix perfectly into the base. This will highlight the face.
7. Now you are ready for the powder. Fill a large puff with plenty of powder. With steady slaps, cover the wet surface until it is completely dry.
8. With your brush, sweep the loose powder from around the eyes and eyebrows. Sweep the face clean.
9. Take an orange stick and a black or a brown stick of paint. Apply the paint to the orange stick. Line your eyes and eyebrows. Apply mascara or paint to the eyelashes.

10. Outline the lips with wet lip rouge. If the rouge is too red, tone it down with a little powder.

To remove make-up, use plenty of cold cream and cheesecloth. Then wash the face, neck, and ears with soap and water.

Apply all make-up before you put on any part of your stage costume. This is a rule never to be broken in the theater. Use a robe or a smock while you are putting on the paint. Wear an old felt hat without a rim to protect your hair from the powder and paint. When your make-up is completed, wash your hands before touching any part of your costume. If you are playing a character part calling for hand make-up, ask someone to help you into your costume. A bit of red paint will ruin any costume.

Modern Make-up

Make-up has come a long way since the day when whitewash was literally scraped off the dressing-room wall and combined with red brick dust and old burnt cork. Along with costumes and scenery, make-up today receives full program credit in most Broadway productions.

In these days of realism in scenic effect and costuming, there is increased necessity for keeping up with the trend of the times in make-up. Gone is the pink-and-white Dresden make-up of the Lillian Russell era. Doll faces are dated; so are the simpering countenances of the clinging vine.

The modern woman is intelligent, natural, and active, and her make-up reflects her mood. No longer does she hide her face behind clouds of white powder and dab on two violent circles of rouge. Instead of bright applelike cheeks, she uses a delicate shade of apricot or a discreet raspberry tint. She matches her lip rouge with her cheek rouge.

Mere prettiness isn't enough for the up-to-date girl. She strives rather for the effect of character and smartness. Any cosmetic shop or department store specialist will work out a make-up to suit the personality of the young actress.

Crepe Hair

Crepe hair is used to make mustaches, beards, false eyebrows, and sideburns. This rope of plaited hair comes in many colors—blond, brown, black, red, silver-gray, and light-gray. It is sold by the yard, goes a long way, and is inexpensive.

The real trick in handling crepe hair lies in pulling the hair through the comb.

To make a mustache, loosen the strands of crepe hair and pull it through the comb so that the hair runs in one direction. Cut off the amount of hair needed and roll it between the hands. Then shape the two ends to a point. Cut the mustache in the middle and apply half to each side of the lips. By making the mustache in two parts, the lips are given freedom in speech.

In order to save time, most professionals get their mustaches from the wigmaker. But each new actor should learn how to make his own mustache. It is easy enough to misplace a small dab of hair, the size of a mustache, when the wigmaker isn't at hand.

In making false eyebrows, follow the directions for making beards, but use a smaller quantity of hair.

In the production of "I'd Rather Be Right," starring George M. Cohan, one of the high spots in the show was a chorus number in which nine Supreme Court judges, complete with long gray beards and flowing black robes, went into a series of pirouettes and cartwheels. To the amazement of everyone, the beards stayed on.

Beards suggest an endless chain of historic characters: Bill Cody's goatee, the handsome black handle bars of the barkeeper of the nineties, Kaiser Wilhelm's imperial waxed appendage, King Edward's Vandyke. Beards and mustaches may be comic, as in the case of Chaplin's toothbrush, or dignified, like the sweeping beard of a Chinese dignitary. They can bristle, or they can flow gently down the chest.

Otis Skinner was once cast as a bearded and putty-nosed alchemist. The action of the play required that he bend over a

steaming caldron to mix his devilish brew. As he muttered his magic abracadabra, some inflammatory powder burst into flame inside the kettle. All went well until one night, in his acting zeal, he bent too far over the caldron. Whiskers, eyebrows and false nose completely disappeared as though in the wake of a prairie fire, not to mention the singeing that his wig received.

Beards

Any kind of beard can be made with crepe hair. Since a Vandyke is the simplest, let us use it for our first example. Loosen about two inches at the end of the strand so that it will comb out easily. Comb out enough hair to make a medium-sized beard. Let the hair remain on the comb. Shape the beard and cut it off square on the other side of the comb. Now hollow out the center to fit the chin. Apply the glue to the chin and stick on the beard.

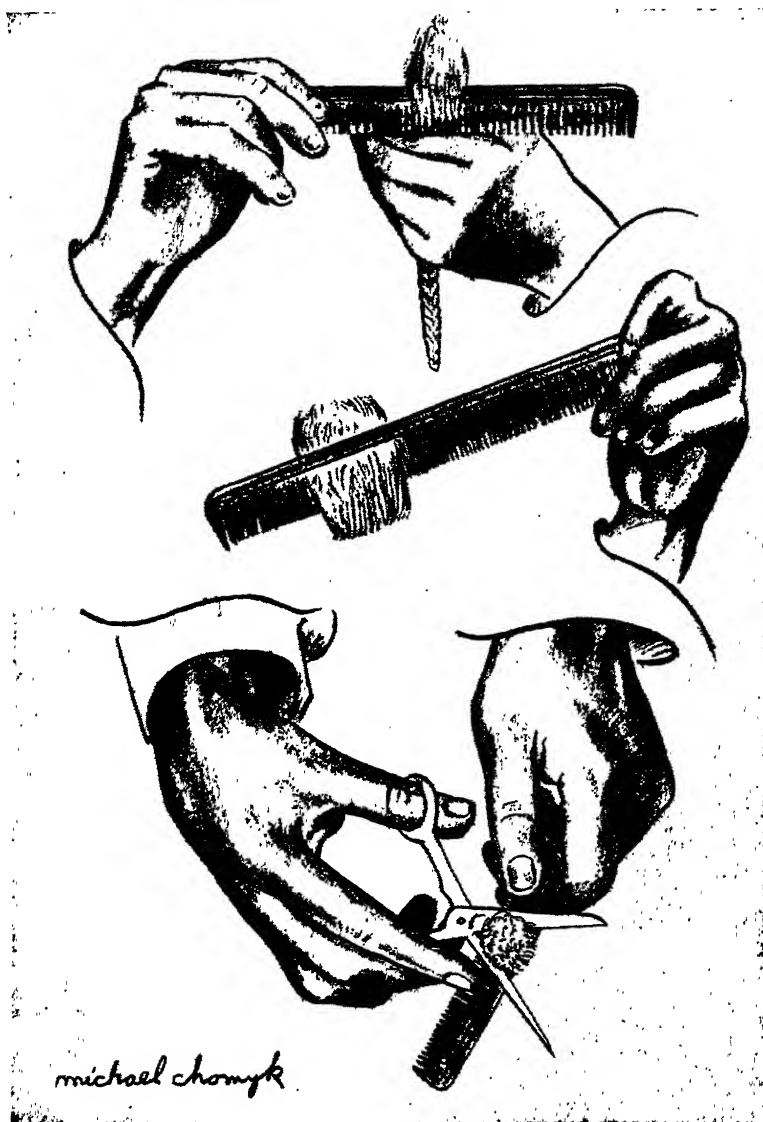
With the glue brush, draw in the rest of the beard with the glue, so that it joins in with your own hair. Cut crepe hair in very fine pieces, about a sixteenth of an inch in length, onto a piece of paper. With a wad of cotton, apply the small particles to the space where you have painted on the glue. Put on the finishing touches with a black liner. Trim the beard to fit your requirements.

Unshaven Face

The effect of a five days' growth of hair on the face can be made by a daub of dark-blue liner rubbed over the parts of the face where the beard grows. The more effective method is to cover the space with glue, cut the crepe hair very fine onto a paper, and then apply the hair with a wad of cotton.

Wigs

Choosing a wig is like choosing a hat. Some of us look well in an off-the-face halo; others prefer the low brim. Whether it be page boy or crew cut, the hairline should be in harmony with the whole facial contour. For instance, if you have a wide, round face, you will avoid bangs. And if you have an extremely high forehead, you will not sweep the hair into a higher pompadour.



Cutting crepe hair. Upper, combing hair from plait; center, hair detached from plait; lower, trimming off excess hair, releasing formed beard on other side of comb.

A full wig makes the face seem larger. A close-fitting one tends to elongate the face. A wig dressed high adds stature. Blond wigs soften the face and contribute a youthful effect.

Putting on a Wig

See that the wig is thinned out and shaped to fit the facial contour. Don't pull on the wig as you would a cap; handle it carefully. Grasp it with the hands at the point where it goes around the ears.

Place the wig band in the correct position on the forehead. Pull the wig down carefully in the back. Now, with grease paint, blend the color of the forehead with the wig so that the join does not show. See that none of your own hair shows at the back. The sides and back are the telltale points of wig wearing.

In the quick stage change, when time is at a premium, the wig is a blessing. During the run of "Show Boat," Norma Terris wore her own curls as a young girl of the play in the opening, a pompadoured wig as a matron in the middle of the play, a white wig as Magnolia grown old.

A good wig is one that to the careful observer isn't a wig at all. And in these days of wigmaking, such deception is perfectly possible.

A number of years ago, I remember, Marilyn Miller turned down Mr. Ziegfeld's offer of the leading role in "East Is West" because she would have had to wear the black wig of a Chinese girl. So sure was she that the character make-up would be unsuccessful that the idea was dropped, and the play was never produced, although thousands of dollars had been spent on authentic Chinese costumes, and plans for the production were well on the way.

Make-up for Middle Age

To make up for middle age is a more difficult task for the youthful player than to try, through the medium of make-up, to depict decrepit old age.

Although the make-up for middle age does not call for many lines, such lines as are used must be placed at exactly the proper location—just as the lines in the face of middle age are naturally placed.

EXERCISES

1. Look at your face in the mirror.
2. Wrinkle the brow; then follow the forehead lines with a colored liner (red or brown).
3. Next squint the eyes; draw crow's-feet with a liner.
4. Look for the line from the nose to the mouth; outline this with a liner.
5. Now highlight these lines and watch the effect.
6. If you haven't achieved the right middle age, add a mustache and don a pair of glasses.
7. Put a touch of gray to the hair.

By following the natural lines in the face and intensifying the wrinkles, you will get the most realistic effects of middle age.

Increasing age is shown by heavier lines and shadows. These lines are made by lowlighting.

Old age in make-up is indicated by a downward line; youth, by an upward line.

Each kind of make-up, juvenile, middle-age or old-age, has a foundation of flesh-tone paint. And for each of these periods there is a variety of colors, running from light shades to more ruddy hues. A young man may have a sallow complexion, just as a middle-aged or old person may have a very ruddy face.

To simplify the matter, we shall consider two foundations: a medium sallow for middle age and a pale sallow for old age. With a little blending of these two foundations, you can get any shade you may require.

Blending Liners and Colors

Liners are thin sticks of grease paint that come in a variety of colors—red, dark-gray, light-gray, white, black, brown. The orangewood sticks used to apply paint where careful lines are



Upper picture, low lights and wrinkles; lower left, high lights; center, high lights and low lights.



Study in character make-up.

Make-up of face: youth to age. Upper center, youth; center, middle age; lower right, old age.

required are also called liners. These liners are convenient for making wrinkles and for highlighting. Some actors use the artist's ordinary paper stumps for blending and making high lights.

To create wrinkles, the actor uses red or brown liners for middle age or very dark gray or brown for older characters. The brown or black liners he uses to line the eyes or eyebrows.

Character Make-up

Before we try character make-up, let us study the drawings on page 270. They show three periods in the progress of a character make-up. The first shows the unlined face. In the second, age has been lined in on the face. The third is the completed character make-up for old age.

Study in Character Make-up

Cover the face, neck, and ears with cold cream and wipe them off dry. Spread flesh paint carefully over your face, neck, and ears. Underline the eyes with brown or gray, carrying the line about a sixteenth of an inch below the lower rim. Smudge with the fingers. Highlight with gray or brown liner. This gives the effect of a deep circle. Next work dark-gray paint onto the fingers and apply it to the cheeks in the shape of a triangle to create a sunken effect. These are the shadows; they are called low lights. With light-gray paint on the finger, blend out the edges. With the orange stick and brown or red paint, line in the wrinkles on your forehead. Then draw in the crow's-feet. Place lines under the eyes; accentuate the mouth lines. Line the neck. Now place light-gray paint on a stick and highlight the wrinkles. Apply white paint up on the cheekbones to create the high light and intensify the effect. Powder completely dry.

Put on your wig carefully. Blend wig band. Line the eyes and eyebrows. Now you are ready for a beard or false eyebrows.

A Story in Grease Paint

When we put on a make-up, we are telling a story with grease paint. All that we are and hope to be is registered on our faces.



Helen Hayes making up for the role of the aged Queen Victoria in the play "Victoria Regina." After grease paint has been applied, Miss Hayes, with the aid of a liner, draws in the shape of the eye. Notice how the effect of deep circles is achieved. (Courtesy of *Life Magazine* and Helen Hayes.)

As our characters form and develop, the contours, expressions, and muscles of our faces change. Obstacle is a character builder, and each hurdle taken is registered on the face. None of us was born with thin, tightly compressed lips, outthrust jaw, narrow, sharp nose, sagging chin. Life and experience put them there.

So it is with make-up!

When we make up we are painting:

Time (age)—wrinkles, sagging muscles, fading skin.

Background (inheritance)—natural skin pigmentation and texture, color of hair, eyelashes, nerve muscles; (environment)



After the eyes are drawn in, Miss Hayes now adds lines about the mouth to increase the illusion of old age. To produce the effect of sagging jowls, Miss Hayes inserts two wads of cotton in her mouth. (*Courtesy of Life Magazine and Helen Hayes.*)

the ruddy complexion of the outdoor person in contrast to the pasty skin of the clerk.

Character—the set of the jaw, muscular control of mouth, eye, and nose muscles.

The lines of our face tell whether we are weak or strong, indulged or controlled.

Mouth

As the eye is the barometer of the intellect, the mouth is the barometer of the emotions. As the person grows in years, the mouth strengthens or weakens. Mental action brings the upper



After a coating of powder the facial make-up is complete. Miss Hayes now carefully adjusts a gray wig. (*Courtesy of Life Magazine and Helen Hayes.*)

lip downward; the lower lip and chin pull upward (thus you have the outthrust chin and jaw). Concentration tightens the muscles around the mouth: lack of control loosens the mouth.

Even in repose, little lines around the mouth testify to the emotional control of the person. These are the lines we study and model after when we create character in grease paint.

The mouth expresses:

Mood:

1. Joy (smile or laughter)
2. Defeat (drooping lips)
3. Bitterness (down at the corners)
4. Anger (compressed)
5. Fear (open)



The final touch to this superlative make-up is a small white cap. Then Miss Hayes is ready to don her costume for the Balmoral scene with Disraeli. (*Courtesy of Life Magazine and Helen Hayes.*)

Background:

1. Repression (thin, tight—disapproval)
2. Craftiness (pursed)
3. Determination (compressed)
4. Sensuality (overdeveloped)

Age:

1. Thin, dry (turned in)
2. Uncontrolled
3. Youth (full, half-parted)

Characteristics:

1. Gnawing and biting lips
2. Twitching

3. Pouting

4. Loose, uncontrolled lips

In making up the mouth, follow the natural line unless you are playing character or old age. To make the lips fuller, extend the outer edges beyond the natural line of your own. To cut down the lips, don't extend the rouge to its natural line.

Thin, compressed lips are achieved by carrying the face grease paint almost to the line where the lips meet when closed and drawing a fine, straight line across the mouth with lip rouge to which a little gray has been mixed.

In building or cutting down the size of the lips, always cover the mouth first with the color of the grease paint used on the face. Then powder over lightly. In this way, the mouth becomes dry and provides a better foundation upon which to draw the new mouth. Shape the new mouth by using an orange stick or toothpick dipped in lip rouge. First outline the shape desired and then fill it in with rouge.

Eyes

The lines about the eyes tell as much about the character as the shape of the eye itself. Again in make-up we have revelation of background, age, and mood. Those who work outdoors in the sun—men of the sea, farmers, cowboys—all have heavy crow's-feet about the eyes. The eye of the miser narrows with crafty thought. The eye of youth is clear and wide. The clerk who concentrates over figures is likely to squint. The deep thinker has furrows between his eyes and marked lines on his brow.

By extending the lines around the eyes, they can be made to seem fuller. With a dark eye pencil, draw a line at the top, at the bottom, and at the outer corner. Follow the natural line of the eye but extend it all the way round, about an eighth of an inch. Then, inside that line, with a white liner, follow the natural rim of the lower lid. The object of this work is to create the illusion of a larger eyeball.

Colored liners are often used on the upper lid to add size and brilliance to the eye. Usually, in a straight make-up, the color

selected blends with the color of the actor's own eyes, which may be blue, brown, or gray. Since the effect wanted is that of a shadowing, be careful to blend it in smoothly, and follow the natural shape of the lid. At the outer edge of the eye, take care not to leave a sharp line, but shade it smoothly into the grease paint used on the face. Some actors make up only the lower half of the lid, beginning about halfway up and shading down.

Chinese Eyes

At the dress rehearsal of a recent revival of "The Mikado," which I directed, the make-up of the chorus was weird indeed. Eyebrows went in all directions, on the bias, perpendicularly, and straight up.

Chinese and Japanese eyes are oblong and small. The eyebrows are high and up at an angle (but be sure of the correct angle). To make up for the part of an Oriental, first flatten down your own eyebrow with soft soap. When it is dry, cover it with grease paint of the same shade that you use on the face. Then, with a black liner, paint on the new eyebrow in a thin line slanting upward. At the outer corner of the eye, put another line, slanting upward, about a quarter of an inch long.

To get the puffy effect under the eyes that a drinker has, draw a rim of white around the lower lid. On either side of the white line, edge with dark brown.

Eyebrows and Eyelashes

Eyebrows are a great aid to building a character. Thick black (beetle) brows accentuate the size of the eye, giving a staring effect; brought low, they shade the eye, causing the appearance of dullness. By the use of the eyebrow, the height of the forehead may be increased or diminished. False eyelashes are today very popular with feminine actresses and are more effective than the heavily beaded ones of the old days.



Hands from youth to old age.
Lower left, youth; center, middle age; lower right, old age.

Hand Make-up

Many actors believe that if they use their hands in the proper physical gestures of the character their obligation ceases. But they are wrong. Hands wrinkle and shrivel; they become gnarled and lean with age. The actor's hand should show this.

The advertising endorsements today have made people more hand-conscious than ever before. If you saw an actress playing an Irish washwoman, authentically dressed in shapeless gingham, comfort shoes, and scraggly hair but with beautifully tapered white hands and long scarlet nails, you would know she had slipped up on her make-up.

In playing straight parts, the hand make-up, which is most desirable in lotion form, should be in keeping with the face make-up.

If you are playing a delicate invalid and are naturally endowed with strong, healthy hands, you must make them up to look long, thin, and transparent. This effect is achieved by putting blue shadows between the fingers and highlighting the tops of the fingers and tendons of the hands with white.

Character in Hands

A bookkeeper or stenographer has ink-stained, smudged hands (a bookkeeper might wear sleeve protectors). A cook might wear a bit of court plaster to hide a burn or a cut. Dentists, hairdressers, washwomen—anyone whose hands are in water a great deal—have red, shriveled hands. Musicians never wear long nails. A thimble, a ring, a smudge of ink will add character to your hands. These are make-up points to remember.

In fleshy hands the bones are well covered, but in thin hands the flesh sinks between the bones, making them prominent. By highlighting and shadowing, age, illness, and character can be conveyed to a hand.

Cover the hand with grease paint of the same shade as used for the face. Then, with gray or light-blue liner, draw in the shadows between the tendons. Blend smoothly so that the gray shades into the flesh paint. To intensify the effect of emaciation, draw

white lines over the top of the fingers (the bones and tendons on the back of the hand). Thus you highlight the bones and lowlight the flesh between.

Arm Make-up

Make-up on the arms should be carried as far as your costume requires. Where the effect of prominent veins is wanted (for veins stand out), intensify the veins with blue liner and shade the liner on each side with light brown, blending it into the foundation grease paint.

Finger Make-up

To lengthen the fingers, put gray shadowing between the knuckles. Even the position of the knuckles may be changed by painting on false knuckles with white liner.

Noses

A sharp, well-shaped nose indicates a keen intellect and mental activity, because in deep concentration the muscles tense and become firm. The shape of the nostril and general structure of the nose show breeding; the width of the bridge between the eyes shows character. Supersensitive people betray their emotion by allowing their nostrils to quiver and dilate.

Noses also indicate how the owner breathes. If the nostrils are wide and active, the entire nose-functioning breathing will be deep. An abnormally narrow nose or flat nose usually means that the breathing is high in the chest.

Emotional indulgence is betrayed by the looseness of the muscle structure at the nostrils. Everyone is familiar with the red bulbous nose of the drinker or loose liver.

The shape of the nose may be altered by grease paint as well as by the use of putty. The effect of a thin nose may be had by highlighting. Draw a thin straight line of white down the bridge of the nose; then shade the sides with light gray. Powder over it.

The effect of a retroussé nose can be had by applying gray shadowing just over the tip.

A crooked or broken nose is simulated by painting a crooked line down the bridge of the nose and highlighting it on either side with white.

Putty Noses

In applying putty, the nose should be entirely free from grease. Otherwise the putty won't stick. The putty can be molded into any shape. It is usually formed after it has been put on the face. When the desired shape is completed, use the cold cream on the face as usual, then the flesh grease paint. Cover the putty nose with grease paint just as you would your own nose. Then apply the powder.

Don't Forget Your Ears!

Ear muffs in summer! That is the effect you will get if you are playing a sun-tanned god and forget to match your own pallid ears to your ruddy face and neck.

Ears have character, too. A well-cut ear, uniformly shaped and close to the head, indicates breeding and sensitiveness. Not all ears have well-developed lobes, but they can be built up. To lengthen the ear lobe, paste on bits of wool that have been cut to the shape of the ear and covered with grease paint. The ears can be pushed forward by placing a lump of putty behind them, or they can be flattened close to the head with adhesive tape.

Changing Facial Contours

Facial contours may be changed by the use of putty, grease paint (high and low lighting), and "plumpers," which may mean anything from a wad of cotton to a piece of apple inserted in the mouth to pad out the cheeks.

The effect of high cheekbones, characteristic of the Indian, may be achieved by adding putty to the bone structure and covering the putty with dark grease paint. Or the cheekbone can be highlighted with a light grease paint blended with dark brown, to produce the same result.



High lights and low lights.

1, Low lights; 2, wrinkles—high lighted; 3, high lights; 4, high lights.

With the aid of putty, chins can be made strong and square or thin and pointed. The chin may also be made more conspicuous by highlighting with white grease paint.

High and Low Lighting

The whole character of a face may be altered by putting a lighter shade of grease paint on the particular feature that is to be emphasized. Cheekbone, chin, nose, and brow are the spots where high lights are most used. A sunken effect is achieved by the contrasting of two highlighting effects on either side of a dark one.

Low lights are used to create the effect of sunken eyes, hollow cheeks, and wrinkles. Light-gray or brown paint is usually best for lowlighting. The darker the shade the more intense the effect. When combined with high lights, the effect is still stronger.

Blackface Make-up

In the old days, when an actor was asked about his experience, he replied, "I did black with Dock," meaning that he had played minstrel shows with Lew Dockstader.

Long ago an actor bought his own cork and burned it over a spirit lamp. Now it is available in cans ready for instant use. Burnt cork is made of vegetable matter and comes off easily with soap and water.

To apply burnt cork, first moisten the face with water. After reducing a small piece of cork with water into a paste, rub it on the palms and then spread it on the face, neck, and forehead. First outline the mouth and eyes with a stick dipped in cork. Don't use lip rouge; leave the mouth its natural color.

Cover the hands with black gloves. If you prefer to make up the hands blacken only the backs.

When playing an old colored servant—a butler or "mammy" type—dark-brown grease paint is more effective than cork, since it is then possible to draw in wrinkles. Draw wrinkle lines with black. On either side of the black line, edge with a white liner and then blend with the brown grease paint.

In "Whoopee," Ziegfeld's musical-comedy version of Owen Davis' farce, "The Nervous Wreck," we faced the problem of finding a natural spot for Eddie Cantor, the star, to do his black-face specialty.

Cantor played a timid man who was plagued with imaginary ailments. Innocently involved with the sheriff's sweetheart, Eddie was hiding with the girl in the kitchen of a ranch house when the sheriff appeared in pursuit. Cantor spied the stove and dove into the oven door. The sheriff gave warning to the posse, "*Don't let a white man get by you.*"

Then one of the ranch-house cowboys lit the kitchen stove. It exploded, and out of the oven came Cantor—in blackface.

Not only was this an excellent laugh getter, but it was an expert job of making up, done in not more than a minute and a half. At first we were doubtful that it could be done, but Cantor, an expert in blackface, was able to accomplish the feat.

Stepping into Character

IT HAS been said that the "character actor" is one who is not expected to make love to the heroine. Actually, anyone who engages in the profession of acting, from the baby player to the doddering old crone, is a "character actor." Stepping out of his own personality and into the character of the person he is playing is his job, and the more accurately he interprets the play character the more successful is his career.

Of course, as the actor grows older and loses some of his good looks and youthful spontaneity, the interpretive aspects of character playing become more and more important. As Sam Dodsworth shouted to his wife Fran, in the play, "Dodsworth," "You'll have to stop getting younger some day," so will the actor have to face the problem of old age. When he outgrows his "ingénue" or "juvenile" stage, his ability to portray characters other than young romantic types will keep his name alive for years.

The playwright creates a character, and the player brings the character to life. Many a mediocre play has been carried to success by the individual performance of one actor. Many a fine play has failed because the leading man or woman acted himself instead of submerging his personality in the part. Such an actor must have a role to fit his type and personality. He has no inventive genius to carry him along. When his vogue is over, he is retired—just at the time when he should be reaching professional maturity.

How a Part Is Built

In creating a character, the playwright draws from life or imagination. No matter how complex or simple the character, he must give him background, philosophy, and appearance. To do this, he may borrow a mannerism from one source, a trait from another, a philosophy from his own beliefs or from those of others. When the part is turned over to the actor for interpretation, it is as close to perfection as the playwright can make it.

Studying Character

In studying the character he is to portray, the actor must use one of two sources: observation of real life or imagination of a world of fancy.

The study of character is the study of human behavior as it reveals itself in situations significant to the pattern of living. All our actions, speech, appearance, and modes of living reveal our characters. Through them we show how we differ from others. The courageous man who buys a small business and goes out on his own can be contrasted with the man who, bound by fear, slaves in an office and hates his job. The absent-minded professor (Mr. Chips), who cares nothing for his personal appearance, differs from the flashily dressed gangster of Franchot Tone's characterization in "The Gentle People."

These contrasts in character are made clear to the audience through what the actor says and does as well as through his appearance.

Character Traits

A character trait is a stereotyped reaction to environment. It is the character's habitual manner of responding to a given situation through action, emotion, and thought. Character traits, which are established early in life, seldom change. The selfish, bold boy remains selfish and bold. The vain, callous girl does not often grow into a gentle, compassionate adult.

Look for these traits in the people whom you know. Ask yourself: How is each trait revealed through (1) appearance, (2) behavior, (3) speech?

LIST OF CHARACTER TRAITS

| | | |
|----------------|----------------------------|----------------|
| affection | idealism | energy |
| contentment | inventiveness | placidity |
| indifference | inferiority | boldness |
| enthusiasm | ambition | indolence |
| amorousness | craftiness | belligerence |
| selfishness | caution | boisterousness |
| generosity | reflectiveness | impulsiveness |
| cowardice | confusion | dominance |
| bravery | imaginativeness | restlessness |
| fastidiousness | disposition to be critical | |

Creating a Character

Sooner or later the young actor will be called upon to present a character of his own creation. By his inventions, he will make that character his own. He will add pieces of stage business that he associates with the character's main trait: a limp, a palsied walk, a stutter—all little human touches that will add novelty and truth to the interpretation.

I once gave the part of an old man to a twenty-year-old player. It was only a bit, but the role was important to the success of the play. The boy took it on with the intelligence of an old-timer. By the opening night, he had acquired the facial resemblance of an elderly man and, at the same time, had learned how to walk and talk in the manner of the aged.

I asked him how he had accomplished the feat of adding fifty years to his appearance and manner. The answer was the only sensible one: he had sought a counterpart in real life. He had studied his own grandfather!

In the theater, he asked the advice of experienced make-up artists on wigs, whiskers, and wrinkles. Patiently, the elaborate make-up was put on and taken off every night during rehearsals



Raymond Massey as the young circuit-riding lawyer, Lincoln, in the Playwrights' production of "Abe Lincoln in Illinois."

Stovepipe hat, bow tie, high boots give authentic costume touches to the characterization. (*Courtesy of Playwrights' Co.*)

when no one, least of all the director, expected the actor to turn up in costume.

The boy relied on initiative, determination, alertness, and planning. Needless to say, he was letter-perfect in the part.

How to Develop Character in the Theater

You are a new player; you have been given your first real part, that of a coal heaver. You aren't a coal heaver, and you do not number one among your acquaintances. You ask yourself, have I ever seen a coal heaver at close range? If not, you go out to look for one.

You find him. His face is smudged with coal dust, his shirt dirty and torn. A rope is tied around his waist in place of a belt. His shoes are brogans (usually worn by laborers). He wears an old felt hat with the rim torn off, held together by a union button pinned through the crown. Here is your coal heaver in real life.

Next, you engage in conversation. You study his gestures, intonations, the use of his hands. Before you leave him, you have a complete picture of a coal heaver. Then it is up to you to carry out that picture in your own portrayal and, at the same time, keep it consistent with the playwright's original conception.

When an actor who is creating a character in a costume play cannot base his interpretation on actual observation, he must depend on intensive research, plus imagination. This he can get from books, that describe the character, period, or location in which the play is laid.

Character Building from the Outside

The actor is the only artist who can at the same time create and be his own creation. The painter, sculptor, author, or composer sets down his creation for someone else to interpret; the actor is given the privilege of living the thing he has created.

To do this, he calls on certain devices for building character from the outside:

1. Appearance
2. Props

3. Mannerisms
4. Walk
5. Posture
6. Talk

Appearance

Is the character to be created vain or indifferent? Neat or careless? Does he wear bright socks, ties, or hobnailed shoes? Trousers of one kind? Coat of another? Does he dress correctly for all occasions, or does he never have the right thing? Does he wear a muffler, rubbers, blue jeans, high boots, dungarees, sports clothes, a butcher's uniform, a miner's cap? If a woman, does she wear flashy costumes, simple, expensive clothes, jewelry, high heels or ground grippers, unusual hats? Is she fastidious or careless? Does she wear the uniform of a maid, hairdresser, cook?

Props

Does he smoke a pipe, wear a heavy gold watch chain, carry an umbrella, wear a silver leg (Walter Huston did in "Knickerbocker Holiday"), use an old-fashioned purse? If a woman, does she (like Irene in "Idiot's Delight") carry a long cigarette holder? Constantly use a compact? Does she carry a piece of pie around with her, as did the old grandmother in "Personal Appearance"? Or a sun lamp and hot-water bottle (the hypochondriac mother in "The Gentle People")? Does she have to have a "silk piece" put on her lap upon which to fold her hands, like the old woman in "Double Doors"? Does she carry a piece of embroidery, as did Helen Hayes in "Victoria Regina"? The parasol and guitar of Cindy Lou in "Kiss the Boys Goodbye"? Or the tray of the waitress in "Boy Meets Girl"?

Mannerisms

Does he stick his hands in his pockets, rock back and forth on his heels, tweak his mustache or eyebrows, clear his throat, moisten his lips? Does he crack Indian nuts (like the producer in "Once in a Lifetime")? Does he peer over his eyeglasses (like

Grandpa Vanderhof in "You Can't Take It with You" or George M. Cohan in "Ah, Wilderness")? Does he stroke his chin, wave his fork around between bites? (Actors often have to eat a full meal on the stage. Leslie Howard did in "The Petrified Forest.") Does she nibble at her nails, tap her foot, pat her hair, use her make-up in public, hum aloud, munch apples and candy, or chew gum noisily? Does she sneeze and sniffle, as did Zeena in "Ethan Frome"?

Walk

Does he shuffle, stride, limp, roll like a sailor, walk with the stiff gait of a cowboy? Does he kick his heels out or toe in? If the character is a woman, does she mince, glide, or trot? Do her heels make a clicking noise?

Posture

Does he slump, sprawl, or perch on the edge of his chair? Does he stretch his legs in front of him or put them together? Are his hands folded in his lap? Does his spine seem a ramrod, or does he sit all in a lump? Does he drape one leg over the arm of the chair? Put his feet on a desk?

Does she curl up with one foot under her? Does she manage to suggest a beautiful and studied pose? Does she sit nervously on the edge of the chair? Does she like to rock? Sit on the floor cross-legged? Does she expose her handsome legs, or does she modestly pull down her skirt?

Talk

Does he use a nasal twang—in a nervous staccato manner? an indifferent drawl? Is his voice hard and raspy, as is the voice of a hawker, a gangster? Is it breathy, as in a fighter or athlete? High-pitched, as in a singer? Cultivated or slangy? If the character is a woman, is her voice shrill, soothing, monotonous, or musical?

Chic Sale's knowledge of small-town people, with whom he'd been associated all his life, gave him an unlimited supply of rural characters. He was able to throw character and humor into his

voice by assuming a high-pitched, cracked tone. Studying simple country folk was really a hobby with him. One of his best characterizations, in a Shubert revue, was that of an old soldier who played in the band. He came on the stage in a faded blue uniform, knees bent, shoulders drooping, lugging his beloved "tubby," a big brass horn. It took him about five minutes to get settled. First he tried to cross his knees; then he had to use his hand to manipulate the one game leg. He looked around for a spittoon; finding none, he swallowed with a loud gulp. Then he announced in a thin, high voice, "I'm goin' ter play 'Marching through Georgia' with variations and double stops!"

The Sale brand of characterization was peculiarly his own. He liked the rural people he portrayed; he *felt them*.

Analysis of Characterization

In Sam and Fran Dodsworth, Sinclair Lewis has created two of the finest characters in fiction or the theater (the play adaptation was by Sidney Howard). Although the man and woman are ordinary middle-aged American people, the parts are crammed with character effects and rich in dramatic possibilities.

Sam Dodsworth (as played by Walter Huston) and Fran (as played by Fay Bainter) had no help from unusual costuming, props, or artificial devices. The strength of each characterization lay in good acting illuminated by a clear conception of the people they were portraying.

EXAMPLE

SAM DODSWORTH

Main Trait: Loyalty

A thinker: His books are to be read; they are not for atmosphere.

Affectionate: After twenty years of married life he still makes romantic love to his wife.

A worker: The thought of selling his automobile factory leaves him bewildered.

Sentimental: Fran's desire to sell their home shocks him. After a short stay in Europe, he wants to go home to his class reunion.

He refuses to leave without Fran. When his daughter's child is born, he wants to be in Zenith with her.

Loyal: He won't hear his home town, Zenith, maligned, even by Fran. Through all her escapades and flirtations, he sticks by his wife until the end.

Solicitous: The idea of his daughter's flying to see him doesn't appeal because of the danger.

Enthusiastic: Europe to Sam means sight-seeing.

Youthfully naïve: The first glimpse of English soil from ship-board excites him immensely. He is surprised to know that people like Mrs. Cortright live in Italy.

Romantic: To Sam, the trip is a belated honeymoon earned after long years of work. He has the true desire of a mate to share.

Imaginative: The lights on the English coast line mean Jane Austen and Robin Hood. In Paris, the rose window in a cathedral stirs him.

Boyish: Embarrassment seizes him when he realizes he has asked Mrs. Cortright too many questions.

Realistic: He doesn't believe in fortune reading through cards. He tries to tell Fran that worth-while Europeans wouldn't bother with two hicks like them. His attitude toward Fran's men friends is never melodramatic.

Human: He likes to walk around the house without his coat. He refuses to snub his American business friends in London.

Humble: He is appreciative of the smallest crumbs of praise from Fran. Traveling has a humbling effect upon him; it shows him his unimportance.

Tender: When the Englishman friend of Fran's insults her, Sam takes her part.

Humorous: He asks Fran if he is supposed to shoot the man. Later, when a travel clerk suggests he visit some Greek ruins in a state of excellent preservation, he replies that that is more than he can say about himself.

Creative: He is proud of his part in creating American cars. He installs a motor on the Italian fisherman's sailboat. He dreams of building an airplane line from Moscow to Seattle.

Lonely: Fran has drifted away from him. His business is no longer his. He can't even find an old crony to lunch with.

Settled: He wants his mail, cigars, liquor to be in the same place at home.

Tolerant: He puts up with Fran's flirtations and nagging.

Sensitive: When he and Fran break up, he hesitates to confide in Mrs. Cortright.

Manly: Likes to fish, hunt, swim; he drinks like a man.

Protective: Even when Fran asks for a divorce in order to marry a younger man, Sam begs her to wait and first be sure of the man.

FRAN DODSWORTH

Main Trait: Selfishness

Childish: For Fran, the trip to Europe is an attempt to escape the reality of approaching age. She is coy; she uses baby talk.

Irresponsible: In this bolt for freedom, home ties and family are unimportant.

Critical: Zenith, their home, is to Fran a half-baked Middle Western town.

Vain: She can dance longer and better than her daughter. She can pass for thirty. Her clothes and appearance are her chief concern. The thought of becoming a grandmother horrifies her.

Flirtatious: On board ship she loses no time in cultivating an Englishman.

Snob: She criticizes her fellow American travelers. She snubs Sam's American business friends in London. She won't sit in a sidewalk cafe with Sam because it isn't smart.

Unsympathetic: She refuses to watch the lights from the ship with Sam, preferring to dance with a comparative stranger.

Climber: She sees Sam as a future ambassador. The flowers sent her by an Englishwoman of noble birth impress her only because they come from the castle garden. An invitation to visit the English countryside means that she has met the right people.

Nagger: Sam's books annoy Fran. They are out of place in the Ritz apartment. She insists that Sam wear his coat. She compels

him to wait on her. Her nagging is her final undoing. When she reproaches Sam for asking her to sit in the drafty ship's bar, he can no longer endure her; he leaves forever.

Prudish: When the Englishman succumbs to her flirtations and asks Fran to come to his apartment for tea, she becomes indignant.

Crafty: Sam is her protection so that she can safely carry on her flirtations. She leases a villa with the idea of sending Sam back to America, leaving her free to do as she pleases.

Naïve: She is impressed and flattered on being recognized by a few unimportant Europeans.

Jealous: She is quick to sense the attractiveness of Mrs. Cortright and her possible attraction for Sam.

From this analysis, the beginner will see that every bit of behavior selected by the author is aimed directly at the most important things he has to say about Sam and Fran Dodsworth. In other words, he has revealed *what they are* through *what they do and say*.

In the same manner, the actors, Mr. Huston and Miss Bainter, have carried on the interpretation. They have played the parts, inside and outside, with perfect understanding. They have a hundred ways to express as actors what the playwright has put in the lines.

Often the strength of a character trait is intensified by *lack of reaction* to a powerful stimulus—that is, by his inhibitions an actor may reveal his personality.

For instance, Sam Dodsworth was so much in love with his wife until the end of the play that he revealed his sense of loyalty and love for her by *closing his eyes to her stupid and dangerous flirtations*. And because of his idealistic love and his hatred of divorce, Sam overlooked Fran's vanity and nagging.

A character trait can be revealed by reverse action. What the actor does is contrary to what he is. There is the man who swaggers, talks loudly, and pretends bravery to hide his inferiority. Again,

there is the timid man who is brave at heart and proves it during a crisis.

Example: The young actress in "Accent on Youth" preferred lounging on a couch and knitting while her middle-aged author husband read aloud to enjoying the company of younger men. This action revealed that although she was young and attractive her main trait was desire for a settled domestic existence.

Thematic Characterization

It is not uncommon for a playwright to illustrate the theme of his play through the development of his main character. Such is the case in "You Can't Take It with You," in which the author, George S. Kaufman, selects Grandpa Vanderhof as the medium through which his theme, "Money isn't everything," is brought home to the audience. Every bit of dialogue and action given to the whimsical elderly character is aimed directly at that philosophy.

Life is a simple thing if you just relax and enjoy it, believes Grandpa. The world is all right; it is the people in it that are wrong. If we didn't worry so much about making money, there would be no bad times. Why spend six hours a day doing what you don't want to do just to be able to spend one hour doing what you like?

Grandpa's philosophy gives him so fine a balance that when the rich and conventional Kirbys, parents of the fiancé of his granddaughter, Alice, pay a premature call, the old gentleman refuses to let the situation disturb his equanimity; instead, he rather enjoys it. Before the guests depart, he gets around to telling Mr. Kirby the real source of his indigestion: his personal frustration. Take life as it comes and have a good time and you will rout indigestion, advises Grandpa.

With a complete indifference to money, Grandpa does not believe in the income-tax system and proves this belief by refusing to pay one.

All he asks from life is a modest income to enable him to enjoy his leisure—practicing throwing feathered darts at a target,

keeping pet snakes, going to commencement exercises, and managing his family.

"Success based on hard work and a solid knowledge of your craft is the only lasting success," is the underlying theme of "Stage Door," by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber.

Terry Randall, an idealistic young actress, who believes "acting isn't a career . . . it's a feeling," illustrates their theme. Quick success in the movies with optional contracts that Terry describes as "piece work" is not for her. She turns down the promising Hollywood offers.

When her play closes after a four-day run, Terry undauntedly takes a job on the radio, and when that fails she sells blouses in a department store, using her lunch hours to stalk the theatrical managers' offices.

Terry's belief and courage are so strong that she even helps a young playwright with his work. And when his play is accepted with the understanding that another girl will play the lead, Terry unselfishly relinquishes the role, putting the success of the play before her personal ambition. In the end, her courage is rewarded. Terry gets a part because she is ready for it, whereas the other girl, a motion picture actress scheduled to play the part, fails because of her lack of ability and preparation.

In "Craig's Wife," by George Kelly, the author uses the character of Mrs. Craig to illustrate the theme that a home without love, friends, and neighbors is just a house. A woman who marries solely for self-emancipation, Mrs. Craig believes that "the security of a wife's future is gained only by control of her husband." This philosophy leads her into actions that eventually drive her husband, relatives, and servants from her.

Flowers in the house annoy Mrs. Craig because the falling petals destroy the rugs. The servants must use the back stairs; the husband is permitted to smoke only in his den. Mrs. Craig discourages his card playing because it means meetings with his friends, whom she goes so far as to insult.

Throughout the play, the character actions reveal the theme. Because she can no longer stand living in "rooms that have died and are all laid out," Mr. Craig's aunt leaves the house. Mrs. Craig's advice, "Marriage need not necessarily include love," almost influences her niece to break her engagement to a poor young professor.

"You can go crazy over a house same as you go crazy over anything else," Mrs. Harold, the Craigs' housekeeper, tells Maisie, the maid. With the additional comment that now Mrs. Craig can do some of the work she always says she does, both servants leave, and Mrs. Craig is left alone in the house that was always designated as "my house" and never "our home."

In these three thematic plays, the leading player is given the responsibility of carrying the playwright's message. To him is given the right kind of behavior and talk in order that the message may be succinct and clear. And for the actor who handles the leading role of a thematic play, the responsibility is doubly heavy. In order to put over the theme, he must have a precise and complete conception of the author's idea.

Characterization and Mimicry

The young actor is likely to confuse characterization with mimicry. On the contrary, there is a vast distinction between the two.

Characterization has to do with individuality, which is the product of nature, habits, and environment.

Mimicry is a travesty on real persons or events. It is a surface mechanical process that does not spring from the emotional behavior of the character. A mimic does not bother to delve into the cause of behavior; he does not study the character trait. He is interested primarily in the effect.

The main reason that a mimic fails to make a direct contact with character is that in imitating speech, mannerism, dialect, carriage, and gestures of a person, he sticks too closely to the original model; he adds nothing of himself.

Mimicry can be the *basis* of characterization, but it cannot be the *whole and complete* process. A long time ago, before Ina Claire became a dramatic star, she did imitations of Sir Harry Lauder in the "New York Folies Bergère," wore a red nose, kilts, and affected a thick Scotch burr. People marveled at the revelation of character—but it was Sir Harry Lauder's character, not the character of a person, living or imagined, created for a part in a play. When we mimic, we make a wax impression; when we act through the mental and emotional processes, we give life to the piece of wax.

If you were cast as a chambermaid (as was Dorothy Hall in "Page Miss Glory"), you might study a maid in order to get a better understanding of the part. You might borrow her walk and speech and costume, but when you got around to acting the part, you would modify or enlarge on these mannerisms through your own individuality. In other words, you would give thought to the character traits of the maid and use your intellect and emotions to select behavior to reveal these traits.

Dressing a Part

In mimicry the character is suggested by costuming and props, such as shawls, canes, caps, and swords. In characterization, on the other hand, the costuming is the direct outcome of the environment, personal taste, and habits of the character.

There is a *reason* behind each piece of costuming. The plantation owner, for instance, wears high boots and a wide-brimmed hat because the swamps in the South abound with snakes and the sun is hot.

The character who wears a leather windbreaker and a cap with ear muffs does so because the play is laid in a cold country.

Although general appearance reflects inner character, tastes, attitudes, and habits, the wearing of a special kind of costume has a decided effect upon behavior; it creates an inner change. This is especially true of the actor. The donning of a plumed hat and a pasteboard sword brings a sense of the actuality of the part to the actor who has been rehearsing with his own fedora and a stick.



Subdued expression, shawl, beard, graying hair alter Mr. Massey's appearance in the final scene of Act III, when he says farewell to Springfield from the platform of his train. (*Courtesy of Playwrights' Co.*)

We all know the psychological effect of a change of wardrobe. For a woman there is nothing like a new hat to bolster a sagging morale; for a man, a bright necktie. When we are tired and hot, a bath and a fresh change of clothing make us feel like new persons. Sports clothes put us at ease. We relax; we aren't afraid they will be spoiled. Formal evening clothes have the opposite effect; we feel dignified and on our best behavior.

"I am proud to wear this uniform," loyally says the man who wears it, whether it is that of a colonel in the army or a bellhop in an exclusive hotel.

Dress rehearsal is always the most exciting moment in the theater. The smallest bit actor or chorus girl, resplendent in a magnificent costume, takes on new confidence. It is a moment of breathless changes. A piece of business has had to be cut out or eliminated because of a long train on a dress or a pair of boots that refuse to bend at the knee. Entrances in sets have had to be widened for hoop skirts. In directing a company of over a hundred actors at the St. Louis Municipal Opera (half of them in hoop skirts), one of my biggest problems is to get them all off stage on cue without leaving half their costumes behind them. The best way to do this is to follow the method of Katharine Cornell, who rehearses with a piece of material or a hoop to suggest the costume that she will wear.

What Size Are You?

A performer's physical stature frequently condemns him to play one kind of part forever.

Until she played "Coquette," Helen Hayes was the perennial ingénue. Not until she appeared in motion pictures in more mature roles did Broadway recognize her capacity for strong character portrayal. In "Mary of Scotland" she prepared her public for her excellent performance in "Victoria Regina."

Despite her smallness, Miss Hayes was able in both roles to convey the impression of regal height. She looked tall because she thought tall, she once told an interviewer.

In "Victoria Regina" she seemed to grow before your eyes. As a young girl, her walk and gesture were light and buoyant. As she grew into middle age, her movements became slower, more deliberate. Finally, as the old queen, she appeared to shrink with age. Miss Hayes' voice intonation changed, too. She used vibrant high tones as the young girl, deeper tones as the settled and middle-

aged queen, and, finally, as an old lady, allowed her voice to shake with uncertainty.

Often a flair for characterization has brought recognition to young people. In her early twenties, Mildred Natwick made a hit as a tyrannical grandmother in the play, "The Distaff Side." She was small in stature, with a thin body and a voice peculiarly adapted to the playing of older parts. Because no one else could or would do older parts, Miss Natwick was given them by the director of the small stock company of which she was a member.

Playing a Drunk

We know that alcohol temporarily paralyzes the mental faculties. This condition has its effect upon physical action, which becomes uncertain and retarded. Under the influence of liquor, the actor's legs are uncertain and unsteady. The slower the movements the better. Make-up takes care of the bleary, red-faced appearance. Speech is retarded.

Although a certain degree of comedy is possible in a character with a slight edge on, overplayed, the drunk becomes a caricature of the ten-twenty-thirty school of acting.

In blurring his body actions to suggest drunkenness, the actor must guard against muffling his speech to such an extent that his words are unintelligible. This can be done satisfactorily if he first learns his lines and then adds the unsteady movements of the body.

When Is An Actor Not An Actor?

In "Show Boat," one of the leading characters is a member of an acting troupe that plays the river towns. In the play he is called "a bad actor who thinks he is good." He is handsome; he plays all the show boat leading parts. In the jargon of the theater, he is a "ham" actor.

In producing the play, our problem was to find an actor who would convey this illusion. We thought we wanted a *bad actor*. Now that was a new order in the theater.

We sent out a call for a bad actor who had a good appearance. One after another they applied, amateurs and semiprofessionals. They were rehearsed and let out. We couldn't find the man.

Here was the catch. "Show Boat" is a play within a play. In one scene the show boat troupe gives a performance, and in this performance the leading man is a wooden actor. But in the other acts of the play the part calls for a man who can play an emotional part of a delicate nature. It calls for a skillful performance by a man who knows every mechanical trick. *In the end, we engaged a good actor to play a bad actor!*

Your Mind Is Your Notebook

The qualities of human nature are universal. The audience recognizes the little human touches and bits of business that the actor has borrowed from daily life. Invariably they bring an amused chuckle, a sigh, or quick applause.

The importance of studying people cannot be overemphasized. The actor's mind is his notebook, ready for the sense impressions, the character behavior, the dramatic situations that come his way.

Example: You are in a restaurant. A man enters, head up, eyes alert. He proceeds to the best table. He signals the waiter. Without a moment's hesitation, he gives his order.

A second man enters. He hangs back timidly. His eyes shift. He takes any table. When the waiter fails to come to him at once, he makes no protest. When the waiter presents the menu, he is embarrassed. He doesn't know what to order.

What is the main trait of the first man?

Of the second?

Look around in the crowded streetcar, at a ball game, in the theater lobby, in a department store. What classes are represented? Are the people happy? Sad? Study each one and make notes on the mood you feel on close observation of the man or woman. Ask yourself, why?

Practice this kind of observation by closing your eyes each night and trying to recall each person you've seen during the day. Ask yourself:

1. Where did I meet him?
2. How was he dressed?
3. Was he in a hurry?
4. Was he happy? Sad?
5. Did his voice please me? Annoy me? Why?
6. Has he an outstanding mannerism?
7. A physical oddity?
8. Has he a philosophy with which I do not agree?

Go through the list, and then try to hold a mental image of a crowd, of their speech, behavior, and appearance.

Some artists have the faculty of memorizing the face of a subject so that they require only one sitting. Theirs is accurate observation plus correct interpretation. You, too, can cultivate such a capacity of character observation and interpretation.

The Summing Up

EVERY so often we hear the report that the theater is on its last legs. That may be true. But they are sturdy trouper's legs, and, although they may bend now and then, as do the rubbery legs of the comic actors, they always bounce back again, stronger and straighter than ever.

When some prophetic soul bemoans the decline of the theater, I am reminded of the dialogue from "The Frogs," by Aristophanes.

DIONYSUS

Well, just that sort of pang devours my heart
For lost Euripides.

HERACLES

A dead man, too.

DIONYSUS

And no one shall persuade me not to go after the man.

HERACLES

Do you mean below to Hades?

DIONYSUS

And lower still, if there's a lower still.

HERACLES

What on earth for?

DIONYSUS

I want a genuine poet, For some are not, and those that are, are bad.

HERACLES

What! Does not Iophon live?

DIONYSUS

Well, he's the sole good thing remaining, if even he is good.
For even of that I'm not exactly certain.

HERACLES

If go you must, there's Sophocles. . . . He comes before Euripides. . . .
Why not take him?

DIONYSUS

Not until I've tried if Iophon's coin rings true when he's alone, apart
from Sophocles.
Besides, Euripides, the crafty rogue,
Will find a thousand shifts to get away.
But he was easy here, is easy there.

Although these words, deploring the condition of the theater in the ancient days, were written in the fifth century B.C., there is something strangely familiar about them, even in the twentieth century A.D.

So far as I can see, the theater has gone through a nearly continuous series of ups and downs, dating back to the time when Aristophanes gave his plaintive wail.

Life moves in a cycle, and the theater, which copies life, does likewise. With the development of new ideas and social values, there is constant change. Twenty-five years ago, in "Sappho," Olga Nethersole shocked the world when Hamilton Revelle carried her in his arms as far as her bedroom door. In "Reunion in Vienna," not only did Alfred Lunt disappear with his lady into

her boudoir but a few moments later he reappeared clad in his nightshirt.

Politics, social conditions, economic crises affect the well-being of the theater, just as they affect the personal lives of the audience. In good times the theater prospers; in bad times it suffers correspondingly.

But the theater lives. And I believe it will continue to live.

Just so long as human nature is what it is and people have curiosity, a thirst for knowledge, and a desire to hear a good story (for, after all, what is an actor's job but to illustrate a story?), men and women will continue to fill theater seats from the orchestra pit to the top balcony.

Television

While the professional mourners are bemoaning the fate of the theater, a whole new art is being born—television. Television will combine not only the technique of the stage, but the precise sound technique of radio and the modified visual technique of the screen.

Because of the width of its scope television will require thousands of new and skilled actors. The broadcast of a single play over a national network is good for only one performance. There will be no long runs as in a play or in a movie. Once a play has appeared, it is finished.

Television is spot news. It can't be edited. Therefore the player must be letter-perfect in his performance. He can't read his part from a script, as in radio. Neither can he learn a few lines at a time as in pictures. Since there are no retakes, there can be no mistakes.

The radio performer who has developed only his diction and vocal tone and who has depended upon voice to sway his audience will now have to use his facial expression and personality as well. Appearance, personal vigor, and charm will count as much as voice.

Television technique will require acting at its best; it will offer a priceless opportunity to the player. And don't think this

chance is closed to you, young actor! Just as the movies and radio drew upon the stage for talent, so will television.

Hints to Heed

The question asked me by every beginning actor is, what outside training should I go through in order to increase my acting ability?

I think that there are certain specific things that the young player should do. He should read all the literature he can get hold of—plays, novels, short stories, and poetry. He should keep abreast of the times by reading at least two daily newspapers and the leading literary magazines that contain the most timely articles on current events. He should form an appreciation of music, either by attending the opera and symphony concerts as often as possible or by joining a class of music appreciation.

As for art, there is no end to the value to be gained from this source. Clothes, make-up, appreciation of color in scenes—all these things are affected by appreciation of art. The beginning actor should visit galleries and study the paintings, even though he never draws a line himself.

The new actor must learn to dance. To do so is mandatory, from the standpoint not only of grace but of actual usage.

He should keep up with the motion picture output, and he should go to the theater whenever he can, even to the mediocre performances of third-rate companies.

Reading, watching people, and listening—those are the actor's chances for growth as a person. The more he learns from others, both through concrete information and through study of character, the better actor he will be.

One word of caution: Don't listen to too many people who tell you what to do!

And don't believe them when they tell you you're a great actor! The generous approval of your friends will encourage you for a long time, but the encouragement is temporary merely. Such amateurish applause of an amateur effort has killed more young talent than it has helped.

Don't Play Down to Your Audience

Actors, particularly those who seldom leave Broadway, are inclined to become insular in their viewpoint. They are likely to patronize their audience, to indulge in what we call "playing down" to the people.

Here's something to watch, young actor!

I've seen actors in tank towns put on as perfect a performance as though Belasco himself graced the audience. And I've seen others who thought it not worth their while to bother to give a good performance for the run-of-the-mill audience gathered to see them. Whatever the audience, no actor can afford to be less than his best.

Actor's Ten Commandments

Thou shalt have no other gods before Thespis.

Thou shalt not steal thy neighbor's glory by crowding, catching flies, or feeding him the wrong cue.

Thou shalt not covet thy star's part. Thou shalt first become proficient in thine own.

Thou shalt put on a good make-up, keep thy wardrobe neat. Thou shalt speak up, for the man in the balcony hath paid, too, and deserveth some consideration.

Thou shalt save thy performance for the audience and spare the management, for thy producer's disposition hath been sorely tried.

Thou shalt not ad lib, for verily the author hath toiled for many nights and many days preparing thy script.

Thou shalt cultivate the gift of silence in the wings, both during rehearsals and during performance. For it is a wise understudy who getteth the part.

Thou shalt not criticize thy director, for though he may at times seem dull and witless he is still thy director.

Thou shalt at all times be sincere and willing.

Thou shalt be on time, and thou shalt always do thy best.

Thou shalt honor thy profession that thy days as an actor may be long and that thou mayest prosper therefrom.

Keeping Up the Standard

A player must come to the theater every evening, rain or shine, sick or well, prepared to be as absorbed in the play as if he didn't know it by heart. That isn't easy, but it is his obligation to his audience. How does he live up to it?

The practical answer is that the actor must keep his mind on his work. This means that interest must be kept at white heat during the whole run of the play. He cannot afford to slump even after weeks of going through the same gestures and saying the same lines. He must retain the emotional intensity called for by the part, and that state is not achieved by mere mechanical portrayal.

The actor cannot be bored. If he catches himself thinking about fatigue or sense of depression, in that instant the audience feels the deflection. It may be very slight, but the player's face shows it. For just a second, he loses his connection with his part and assumes a blank stare—and the fine glow is gone.

Secondly, the actor must remember that it is his job to give just as good a performance on the closing night as on the opening. The people are sitting on the edge of their seats, waiting to be entertained. The audience are ready to meet him halfway; he dares not let them down.

Third, in order to keep his part going well, the actor must grow as a person.

At first he thinks he has a good understanding of the part. He works conscientiously at each performance, and meanwhile he continues to study, read, and observe people when he is away from the theater. After several months of playing, he is delighted to find that his work is showing improvement. The stage director (if he is generous) calls the player's attention to some new idea or gesture or inflection of voice that is illuminating his performance. Better still, a critic, on seeing the play for the second time, may give the actor a line on his improvement. The player goes on with his part with a new and rich knowledge of what he has to give.

This kind of rediscovery of his part is possible to any actor who continues to study his art, no matter how letter-perfect he may seem.

Actually, he can always be a shade better; there is always a chance for growth.

One of the most important actors in the American theater said to me on the anniversary of fifteen years of stardom, "My ambition is to be a good actor."

Acting is such rewarding work that no effort is too great to put into it. The actor carries the audience outside themselves and gives them a chance to live emotions vicariously. Because the actor deals with human values, he must be sure that he is portraying the emotions truthfully and that his audience is getting from him a realistic interpretation of those truths.

As for the personal gain of the actor, the greatest satisfaction that dramatic training offers is that, as he studies and practices acting technique, he is developing within himself so that he is becoming a finer and more worth-while person than he was and, hence, has more to give to his profession.

How good an actor he can be depends on how much he has to give and how well he can fill the place that is the actor's individual niche in the world of the stage.

Glossary

- ad lib.* Lines or business not designated in script.
- apron.* Small strip of stage just behind the footlights.
- aside.* Speech not addressed to other players on stage.
- blackout.* Stage darkened.
- breaking up.* Change of stage grouping by use of movement; also used in describing the phrasing of dialogue.
- build-up.* Increased tension or pace.
- business.* Detailed stage movement.
- cover.* To stand in front of an actor or group so as to hide them from the audience.
- cross.* A stage move in any direction.
- cue.* Last two or three words of the preceding speech, which the actor learns along with his own.
- dialogue.* Lines spoken by actors.
- downstage.* Area closest audience.
- dress stage.* Keep stage picture balanced.
- emphasis.* To intensify either business or lines.
- exposition.* Playwright's lines of explanatory material.
- feed line.* Line in comedy that supplies point for line that gets the laugh.
- focus.* Center of interest.
- give.* Make room or move slightly.
- hold.* Suspend speech and action.
- mask.* Cover a piece of business or an actor.
- mechanic.* A rehearsed piece of business.
- out front.* Audience.
- overlap.* Begin a speech before preceding one is finished.
- pickup.* Quick attack on either action or dialogue.
- places.* Locations designed in script for actors.
- plugging.* Exaggerate.
- point up.* Emphasize.
- proscenium.* Arch surrounding stage.
- project.* Throw voice out.
- props.* Furniture or large objects called stage props. Small objects used by actors are called hand props.
- set.* Stage business that is established. Also abbreviation for stage setting.
- side.* Pages on which an actor's part is written.

tempo. Rate of playing or speaking.

timing. Stage movement, dialogue, or business planned so that they correlate.

topping. Beginning speech with greater intensity or higher pitch than that of preceding one.

upstage. Area farthest from audience.

wings. Sides of the stage not seen by audience.

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